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STEPSONS OF FRANCE

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A ROMANCE OF THE NURSERY

(Continued at back of book.)

STEPSONS OF FRANCE

PERCIVAL
CHRISTOPHER WREN

JOHN MURRAY

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TO
THE AUTHOR OF
"SALAAM"

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"Soldats de la Légion,
De la Légion Étrangère,
N'ayant pas de nation,
La France est votre Mère."

WAR-SONG OF THE LEGION.

STEPSONS OF FRANCE

I

TEN LITTLE LEGIONARIES

AT the Depôt at Sidi-bel-Abbès, Sergeant-Major Suicide-Maker was a devil, but at a little frontier outpost in the desert, he was *the* devil, the increase in his degree being commensurate with the increase in his opportunities. When the Seventh Company of the First Battalion of the Foreign Legion of France, stationed at Aïnargoula in the Sahara, learned that Lieutenant Roberte was in hospital with a broken leg, it realized that, Captain d'Armentières being absent with the Mule Company, chasing Touaregs to the south, it would be commanded for a space by Sergeant-Major Suicide-Maker—in other words by The Devil.

Not only would it be commanded by him, it would be harried, harassed, hounded, bullied,

brow-beaten, and be-devilled; it would be unable to call its soul its own and loth to so call its body.

On realizing the ugly truth, the Seventh Company gasped unanimously and then swore diversely in all the languages of Europe and a few of those of Asia and Africa. It realized that it was about to learn, as the Bucking Bronco remarked to his friend John Bull (once Sir Montague Merline, of the Queen's African Rifles), that it had been wrong in guessing it was already on the ground-floor of hell. Or, if it had been there heretofore, it was now about to have a taste of the cellars.

Sergeant-Major Suicide-Maker had lived well up to his reputation, even under the revisional jurisdiction and faintly restraining curb of Captain d'Armentières and then of Lieutenant Roberte.

Each of these was a strong man and a just, and though anything in the world but mild and indulgent, would not permit really unbridled vicious tyranny such as the Sergeant-Major's unsupervised, unhampered sway would be. Under their command, he would always be limited to the surreptitious abuse of his very considerable legitimate powers. With no one above him, the mind shrank from contemplat-

ing the life of a Legionary in Aïnargoula, and from conceiving this worthy as absolute monarch and arbitrary autocrat.

The number of men undergoing *cellule* punishment would be limited only by standing room in the cells—each a miniature Black Hole of Calcutta with embellishments. The time spent in drilling at the *pas gymnastique* [1] and, worse, standing at " attention " in the hottest corner of the red-hot barrack-yard would be only limited by the physical capacity of the Legionaries to run and to stand at " attention." Never would there be " *Rompez* " [2] until some one had been carried to hospital, suffering from heatstroke or collapse. The alternatives to the maddening agony of life would be suicide, desertion (and death from thirst or at the hands of the Arabs), or revolt and the Penal Battalions —the one thing on earth worse than Legion life in a desert station, under a half-mad bully whose monomania was driving men to suicide. *Le Cafard*, the desert madness of the Legion, was rampant and chronic. Ten legionaries under the leadership of a Frenchman calling himself Blondin, and who spoke perfect English and German, had formed a secret society and hatched a plot. They were going to " remove "

[1] The " double " march. [2] Dismiss.

Sergeant-Major Suicide-Maker and "go on pump," as the legionary calls deserting.

Blondin (a pretty, black-eyed, black-moustached Provençal, who looked like a blue-jowled porcelain doll) was an educated man, brilliantly clever, and of considerable personality and force of character. Also he was a finished and heartless scoundrel. His nine adherents were Ramon Diego, a grizzled Spaniard, a man of tremendous physical strength and weak mind; Fritz Bauer, a Swiss, also much stronger of muscle than of brain; a curious Franco-Berber half-caste called Jean Kebir, who spoke perfect Arabic and knew the Koran by heart (*Kebir* is Arabic for "lion," and a lion Jean Kebir was, and Blondin had been very glad indeed to win him over, as he would be an invaluable interpreter and adviser in the journey Blondin meant to take); Jacques Lejaune, a domineering, violent ruffian, a former merchant-captain, who could steer by the stars and use a compass; Fritz Schlantz, a wonderful marksman; Karl Anderssen, who had won the *médaille* for bravery; Mohamed the Turk—just plain Mohamed (*very* plain); Georges Grondin the musician who was a fine cook; and finally the big Moorish negro, Hassan Moghrabi, who understood camels and horses.

The Society had been larger, but Franz Joseph Meyr the Austrian had killed Dimitropoulos the Greek, had deserted alone, and been filleted by the Touaregs. Also Alexandre Bac, late of Montmartre, had hanged himself, and La Cigale had gone too hopelessly mad.

It had been for a grief unto Monsieur Blondin that he could by no means persuade old Jean Boule to join. On being sworn to secrecy and "approached" on the subject, ce bon Jean had replied that he did not desire to quit the Legion (*Bon sang de Dieu!*), and, moreover, that if he went "on pump," his friends les Légionnaires Rupert, 'Erbiggin, and le Bouckaing Bronceau would go too—and he did not wish to drag them into so perilous a venture as an attempt to reach the Moroccan coast across the desert from Aïnargoula. Moreover, if he came to know anything of the plot to kill the Sergeant-Major he would certainly warn him, if it were to be a mere stab-in-the-back assassination affair, some dark night. A fair fight is a different thing. If Blondin met the Sergeant-Major alone, when both had their sword-bayonets—that was a different matter. . . .

Monsieur Blondin sheered off, and decided that the less Jean Boule knew of the matter, the better for the devoted Ten. . . .

"Ten little Légionnaires
Going 'on pump,'
Got away safely
And gave *les autres* the 'ump,"

sang Monsieur Blondin, who was very fond of airing his really remarkable knowledge of colloquial English, British slang, clichés, rhymes, and *guinguette* songs. Not for nothing had he been a Crédit Lyonnais bank-clerk in London for six years. Being a Provençal, he added a pronounced *galégeade* wit to his *macabre* Legion-humour.

One terrible day the Sergeant-Major excelled himself—but it was not, as it happened, one of the Ten who attempted to "remove" him.

Having drilled the parade of "defaulters" almost to death, he halted the unfortunate wretches with their faces to a red-hot wall and their backs to the smiting sun, and kept them at "attention" until Tou-tou Boil-the-Cat, an evil liver, collapsed and fell. He was allowed to lie. When, with a crash, old Tant-de-Soif went prone upon his face, paying his dues to Alcohol, the Sergeant-Major gave the order to turn about, and then to prepare to fire. When the line stood, with empty rifles to the shoulder, as in the act of firing, he kept it in the

arduous strain of this attitude that he might award severe punishment to the owner of the first rifle that began to quiver or sink downward. As he did so, he lashed and goaded his victims mercilessly and skilfully.

At last, the rifle of poor young Jean Brecque began to sway and droop, and the Sergeant-Major concentrated upon the half-fainting lad the virulent stream of his poisonous vituperation. Having dealt with the subject of Jean, he began upon that of Jean's mother, and with such horrible foulness of insult that Jean, whose mother was his saint, sprang forward and swung his rifle up to brain the cowardly brute with the butt. As he bounded forward and sprang at the Sergeant-Major, that officer coolly drew his automatic pistol and shot Jean between the eyes.

Had Blondin acted then, his followers, and the bulk of the parade, would have leapt from their places and clubbed the Sergeant-Major to a jelly. But Monsieur Blondin knew that the Sergeant-Major had seven more bullets in his automatic, also that the first man who moved would get one of them, and suicide formed no part of his programme.

"Not just anyhow and anywhere in the trunk, you will observe, *scélérats*," remarked

the Suicide-Maker coolly, turning Jean over with his foot, "but neatly in the centre of the face, just between the eyes. My favourite spot. *Cessez le feu! Attention! Par files de quatre. Pas gymnastique. . . . En avant. . . . Marche!*" . . .

The plan was that the Ten, stark naked—so as to avoid any incriminating stains, rents, or other marks upon their garments—should, bayonet in hand, await the passing of the "Suicide-Maker" along a dark corridor that evening. Having dealt with him quietly, but faithfully, they would dress, break out of the post, and set their faces for Morocco at the *pas gymnastique.*

As for Monsieur Blondin, he was determined that this should be no wretched abortive stroll into the desert, ending in ignominious return and surrender for food and water; in capture by *goums*[1] in search of the 25 franc reward for the return of a dead or alive deserter; nor in torture and death at the hands of the first party of nomad Arabs that should see fit to fall upon them. Blondin had read the *Anabasis* of one Xenophon, and an *Anabasis* to Maroc he intended to achieve on the shoulders,

[1] Arab gens d'armes.

metaphorically speaking, of the faithful nine. Toward the setting sun would he lead them, across the Plain of the Shott, through the country of the Beni Guil, toward the Haut Atlas range, along the southern slopes to the Adrar Ndren, and so to Marakesh and service with the Sultan, or to escape by Mogador, Mazagan, or Dar-el-Beida. No more difficult really than toward Algiers or Oran, and, whereas capture in that direction was certain, safety, once in Morocco, was almost equally sure. For trained European soldiers were worth their weight in silver to the Sultan, and, in his service, might amass their weight in gold. A Moorish villa (and a harem) surrounded by fig-orchards, olive-fields, vineyards, palm-groves, and a fragrant garden of pepper-trees, eucalyptus, walnut, almond, oleander, orange and lemon, would suit Monsieur Blondin well. Oh, but yes! And the Ouled-Nael dancing-girls, Circassian slaves, Spanish beauties. . . .

The first part of the plan failed, for *ce vieux sale cochon* of a Jean Boule came along the corridor, struck a match to light his cigarette, saw the crouching, staring, naked Ten, and, being a mad Englishman and an accursed dog's-tail, saved the life of the Sergeant-Major. That the Ten took no vengeance upon Jean Boule

was due to their lack of desire for combat with the mighty *Americain*, le Bouckaing Bronceau, and with those tough and determined fighters, les Légionnaires Rupert and 'Erbiggin. All four were masters of *le boxe*, and, if beaten, knew it not. . . .

The Ten went " on pump " with their wrongs unavenged, save that Blondin stole the big automatic-pistol of the Sergeant-Major from its nail on the wall of the orderly-room.

They took their Lebel rifles and bayonets, an accumulated store of bread and biscuits, water, and, each man, such few cartridges as he had been able to steal and secrete when on the rifle-range, or marching with " sharp " ammunition.

Getting away was a matter of very small difficulty ; it would be staying away that would be the trouble. One by one, they went over the wall of the fort, and hid in ditches, beneath culverts, or behind cactus-bushes.

At the appointed rendezvous in the *village Nègre*, the Ten assembled, fell in, and marched off at the *pas gymnastique*, Blondin at their head. After travelling for some hours, with only a cigarette-space halt in every hour, and ere the stars began to pale, Blondin gave the order " *Campez !* " and the little company

sank to the ground, cast off accoutrements and capotes, removed boots, and fell asleep. Before dawn Blondin woke them and made a brief speech. If they obeyed him implicitly and faithfully, he would lead them to safety and prosperity; if any man disobeyed him in the slightest particular, he would shoot him dead. If he were to be their leader, as they wished, he must have the promptest and most willing service and subordination from all. There was a terrible time before them ere they win to the Promised Land, but there was an infinitely worse one behind them—so let all who hoped to attain safety and wealth look to it that his least word be their law.

And the Ten Bad Men, desperate, unscrupulous, their hand against every man's, knowing no restraint nor law but Expedience, set forth on their all but hopeless venture, trusting ce cher Blondin (who intended to clamber from this Slime-pit of Siddim on their carcases, and had chosen them for their various utilities to his purpose).

At dawn, Blondin leading, caught sight of a fire as he topped a ridge, sank to earth, and was at once imitated by the others.

He issued clear orders quickly, and the band skirmished toward the fire, *en tirailleur*, in a

manner that would have been creditable to the Touaregs themselves. It was a small Arab *douar*, or encampment, of a few *felidj* (low camel-hair tents), and a camel-enclosure. Blondin's shot, to kill the camel-sentry and bring the Arabs running from their tents, was followed by the steady, independent-firing which disposed of these unfortunates.

His whistle was followed by the charge, which also disposed of the remainder and the wounded, and left the Ten in possession of camels, women, food, weapons, tents, Arab clothing, and money. Fortune was favouring the brave! But the Ten were now Nine, for, as they charged, the old sheikh, sick and weak though he was, fired his long gun into the chest of Karl Anderssen at point-blank range. . . .

An hour later the *djemels* were loaded up with what Blondin decided to take, the women were killed, and the Nine were again *en route* for Maroc, enhearted beyond words. There is a great difference between marching and riding, between carrying one's kit and being carried oneself, and between having a little dry bread and having a fine stock of goat-flesh, rice, raisins, barley, and dates when one is crossing the desert.

In addition to the *djemels*, the baggage-

camels, there were five *mehara* or swift riding-camels, and, on four of these, Monsieur Blondin had mounted the four men he considered most useful to his purposes—to wit, Jean Kebir, the Berber half-caste who spoke perfect Arabic as well as the *sabir* or lingua-franca of Northern Africa, and knew the Koran by heart ; Hassan Moghrabi, the Moorish negro, who understood camels and horses ; Mohamed the Turk, who also would look very convincing in native dress ; and Jacques Lejaune, who could use a compass and steer by the stars, and who was a very brave and determined scoundrel.

When allotting the *mehara* to these four, after choosing the best for himself, Blondin, hand on pistol, had looked for any signs of discontent from Ramon Diego, Fritz Bauer, Fritz Schlantz, or Georges Grondin, and had found none. Also when he ordered that each man should cut the throat of his own woman, and Hassan Moghrabi should dispose of the three superfluous ones, no man demurred. The Bad Men were the less disposed to refuse to commit cold-blooded murder because the stories of the tortures inflicted upon the stragglers and the wounded of the Legion are horrible beyond words—though not more horrible than the authentic photographs of the tortured remains

of these carved and jointed victims, that hang, as terrible warnings to deserters, in every *chambrée* of the *casernes* of the Legion. They killed these women at the word of Blondin—but they knew that the women would not have been content with the mere killing of *them*, had they fallen into the hands of this party of Arabs.

As, clad in complete Arab dress, they rode away in high spirits, le bon Monsieur Blondin sang in English, in his droll way—

> "Ten little Légionnaires
> Charging all in line—
> A naughty Arab shot one
> And then—there were *Nine*."

The Nine rode the whole of that day and, at evening, Blondin led them into a *wadi* or canyon, deep enough for concealment and wide enough for comfort. Here they camped, lit fires, and Georges Grondin made a right savoury stew of kid, rice, raisins, barley, dates, and bread in an Arab *couscouss* pot. The Nine slept the sleep of the just and, in the morning, arose and called ce bon Blondin blessed. With camels, food, cooking-pots, sleeping-rugs, tents, clothing, extra weapons, and much other useful loot, hope sprang strong as well as eternal in their more or less human breasts.

Blondin led them on that day until they had made another fifty miles of westing, and halted at a little oasis where there was a well, a *kuba* (or tomb of some marabout or other holy person), and a small *fondouk* or caravan rest-house. Jean Kebir having reconnoitred and declared the *fondouk* empty, and the place safe, they watered their camels, occupied the *fondouk*, and, after a pleasant evening and a good supper, slept beneath its hospitable and verminous shelter—four of the party being on sentry-go, for two hours each, throughout the night.

At this place, the only human beings they encountered were a horrible disintegrating lump of disease that hardly ranked as a human being at all, and an ancient half-witted person who appeared to combine the duties of verger and custodian of the *kuba* with those of caretaker and host of the *fondouk*. Him, Jean Kebir drove into the former building with horrible threats. Fortunately for himself, the aged party strictly conformed to the orders of Kebir, for Blondin had given the Berber instructions to dispatch him forthwith to the joys of Paradise if he were seen outside the tomb. Next day, as the party jogged wearily along, Blondin heard an exclamation from Jean Kebir and, turning, saw him rein in his *mehari* and stare

long and earnestly beneath his hand toward the furthermost sand-hills of the southern horizon. On one of these, Blondin could make out a speck. He raised his hand, and the little cavalcade halted.

"What is it?" he asked of Kebir.

"A Targui scout," was the reply. "We shall be attacked by Touaregs—*now* if they are the stronger party, to-night in any case—unless we reach some *ksar* [1] and take refuge. . . . That might be more dangerous than waiting for the Touaregs, though."

"How do you know the man is a Targui?" asked Blondin.

"I do not know *how* I know, but I *do* know," was the reply. "Who else would sit all day motionless on a *mehari* on top of a sand-hill but a Targui? The Touareg system is to camp in a likely place and keep their horses fresh while a chain of slaves covers a wide area around them. In bush country they sit up in trees, and in the desert they sit on camels, as that fellow is doing. Directly they spot anything, they rush off and warn their masters, who then gallop to the attack on horseback if they are in overwhelming strength, or wait until night if they are not."

[1] Fortified village.

Even as he spoke the watcher disappeared. "Push on hard," ordered Blondin, and debated as to whether it would be better for the *mehari*-mounted five to desert the *djemel*-mounted four and escape, leaving them to their fate, or to remain, a band of nine determined rifles. Union is strength, and there is safety in numbers—so he decided that the speed of the party should be that of the well-flogged *djemels*.

"Goad them on, *mes enfants*," cried he to Diego, Bauer, Schlantz, and Grondin. "I will never desert you—but you must put your best leg foremost. We are nine, and they may be ninety or nine hundred, these *sacrés chiens* of Touaregs." An hour of hard riding, another—with decreasing anxiety, and suddenly Blondin's sharp, clear order:

"*Halte! . . . Formez le carré! . . . Attention pour les feux de salve!*" as, with incredible rapidity, an avalanche of horsemen appeared over a ridge and bore down upon them in a cloud of dust, with wild howls of "*Allah Akbar!*" . . . "*Lah illah il Allah!*" and a rising united chant "*Ul-ul-ul-ul Ullah Akbar.*"

Swiftly the trained legionaries dismounted, knelt their camels in a ring, took cover behind

them, and, with loaded rifles, awaited their leader's orders. Coolly Blondin estimated the number of this band of The-Forgotten-of-God, the blue-clad, Veiled Men of the desert. . . . Not more than twenty or thirty. They would never have attacked had not their scout taken the little caravan to be one of traders, some portion of a migrating tribe, or, perchance, a little gang of smugglers, traders of the Ouled-Ougouni or the Ouled-Sidi-Sheikhs, or possibly gun-running Chambaa taking German rifles from Tripoli to Morocco—a rich prey, indeed, if this were so. Each Chambi would fight like Iblis himself though, if Chambaa they were, for such are fiends and devils, betrayers of hospitality, slayers of guests, defilers of salt, spawn of Jehannum, who were the sons and fathers of murderers and liars. Moreover, they would be doubly watchful, suspicious, and resolute if they, French subjects, were smuggling German guns across French territory into Morocco under the very nose of the Bureau Arabe. . . . However, there were but nine of them, in any case, so *Ul-ul-ul-ul-ul Ullah Akbar!*

"Don't fire till I do—and then at the horses, and don't miss," shouted Blondin.

The avalanche swept down, and lances were lowered, two-handed swords raised, and guns

and pistols presented—for the Touareg fires from the saddle at full gallop.

Blondin waited.

Blondin fired. . . . The leading horse and rider crashed to the ground and rolled like shot rabbits. Eight rifles spoke almost simultaneously, and seven more men and horses spun in the dust. At the second volley from the Nine, the Touaregs broke, bent their horses outward from the centre of the line, and fled. All save one, who either could not, or would not, check his maddened horse. Him Blondin shot as his great sword split the skull of Fritz Bauer, whose poor shooting, for which he was notorious, had cost him his life. "*Cessez le feu,*" cried Blondin, as one or two shots were fired after the retreating Arabs. "They won't come back, so don't waste cartridges. . . . See what hero can catch me a horse."

As he coolly examined the ghastly wound of the dying Fritz Bauer, he observed to the faithful Jean Kebir "*Habet!*" and added—

"Nine little Légionnaires—
But one fired late
When a Touareg cut at him—
And so there were *Eight.*"

"*Eh bien, mon Capitaine?*" inquired Kebir.
"*N'importe, mon enfant!*" smiled Monsieur

Blondin, and turned his attention to the property and effects of the dying man. . . .

"We shall hear more of these Forsaken-of-God before long," observed Jean Kebir when the eight were once more upon their way.

They did. Just before sunset, as they were silhouetted against the fiery sky in crossing a sandhill ridge, there was a single shot, and Georges Grondin, the cook, grunted, swayed, observed "*Je suis bien touché,*" and fell from his camel.

Gazing round, Blondin saw no signs of the enemy. The plain was empty of life—but there might be hundreds of foemen behind the occasional aloes, palmettos, and Barbary cacti; crouching in the *driss*, or the thickets of lentisks and arbutus and thuyas. Decidedly a place to get out of. If a party of Touaregs had ambushed them there, they might empty every saddle without showing a Targui nose. . . .

A ragged volley was fired from the right flank.

"Ride for your lives," he shouted, and set an excellent example to the other seven.

"What of Grondin?" asked Kebir, bringing his *mehari* alongside that of Blondin.

"Let the dead bury their dead," was the reply. (Evidently the fool had not realized

that the *raison d'être* of this expedition was to get one, Jean Blondin, safe to Maroc !)

An hour or so later, in a kind of little natural fortress of stones, boulders, and rocks, they encamped for the night, a sharp watch being kept. But while Monsieur Blondin slept, Jean Kebir, who was attached to Georges Grondin, partly on account of his music and partly on account of his cookery, crept out, an hour or so before dawn, and stole back along the track, in the direction from which they had come.

He found his friend at dawn, still alive ; but as he had been neatly disembowelled and the abdominal cavity filled with salt and sand and certain other things, he did not attempt to move him. He embraced his cher Georges, bade him farewell, shot him, and returned to the little camp.

As the cavalcade proceeded on its way, Monsieur Blondin, stimulated by the brilliance and coolness of the glorious morning, and by high hopes of escape, burst into song.

> " Eight little Légionnaires
> Riding from 'ell to 'eaven,
> A wicked Targui shot one—
> And then there were *Seven*,"

improvised he. . . .

Various reasons, shortness of food and water being the most urgent, made it desirable that they should reach and enter a small *ksar* that day.

Towards evening, the Seven beheld what was either an oasis or a mirage—a veritable eye-feast in any case, after hours of burning desolate desert, the home only of the hornéd viper, the lizard, and the scorpion.

It proved to be a small palm-forest, with wells, irrigating-ditches, cultivation, pigeons, and inhabitants. Cultivators were hoeing, blindfolded asses were wheeling round and round *noria* wells, veiled women with red *babooshes* on their feet bore brightly coloured water-vases on their heads. Whitewashed houses came into view, and the cupola of an adobe-walled *kuba*.

Jean Kebir was sent on to reconnoitre and prospect, and to use his judgment as to whether his six companions—good men and true, under a pious vow of silence—might safely enter the oasis, and encamp.

While they awaited his return, naked children came running towards them clamouring for gifts. They found the riders dumb, but eloquent of gesture—and the gestures discouraging.

Some women brought clothes and commenced to wash them in an irrigation stream, on some flat stones by a bridge of palm trunks. The six sat motionless on their camels.

A jet-black Haratin boy brought a huge basket of Barbary figs and offered it—as a gift that should bring a reward. At a sign from Blondin, Mohamed the Turk took it and threw the boy a *mitkal.*

"Salaam," said he.

"*Ya, Sidi, Salaam aleikoum,*" answered the boy, with a flash of perfect teeth.

Blondin glared at Mohamed. Could not the son of a camel remember that the party was dumb—pious men under a vow of silence? It was their only chance of avoiding discovery and exposure as accursed Roumis [1] when they were near the habitations of men.

A burst of music from tom-tom, derbukha, and raita broke the heavy silence, and then a solo on the raita, the "Muezzin of Satan," the instrument of the provocative wicked voice. Some one was getting born, married, or buried, apparently.

Fritz Schlantz, staring open-mouthed at cyclamens, anemones, asphodels, irises, lilies, and crocuses between a little cemetery and a stream,

[1] Europeans.

was, for the moment, back in his Tyrolese village. He shivered. . . .

Jean Kebir returned. He recommended camping on the far side of the village at a spot he had selected. There were strangers, heavily armed with yataghans, lances, horse-pistols, flissas, and *moukalas* in the *fondouk*. In addition to the flint-lock *moukalas* there were several repeating rifles. They were all clad in *burnous* and *chechia*, and appeared to be half-trader, half-brigand Arabs of the Table-land, perhaps Ouled-Ougouni or possibly Aït-Jellal. Anyhow, the best thing to do with them was to give them a wide berth.

The Seven passed through the oasis and, camping on the other side, fed full upon the proceeds of Kebir's foraging and shopping.

That night, Fritz Schlantz was seized with acute internal pains, and was soon obviously and desperately ill.

"Cholera!" said Monsieur Blondin on being awakened by the sufferer's cries and groans. "Saddle up and leave him."

Within the hour the little caravan had departed, Jacques Lejaune steering by the stars. To keep up the spirits of his followers Monsieur Blondin sang aloud.

First he sang—

"Des marches d'Afrique
J'en ai pleine le dos.
On y va trop vite.
On n'y boit que de l'eau.
Des lauriers, des victoires,
De ce songe illusoire
Que l'on nomme 'la gloire,'
J'en ai plein le dos,"

and then *Derrière l'Hôtel-Dieu*, and *Père Dupanloup en chemin de fer*. In a fine tenor voice, and with great feeling, he next rendered *L'Amour m'a rendu fou*, and then, to a tune of his own composition, sang in English—

"Seven little Légionnaires
Eating nice green figs,
A greedy German ate too much—
And then there were *Six*."

Day after day, and week after week, the legionaries pushed on, sometimes starving, often thirsty, frequently hunted, sometimes living like the proverbial *coq en pâte*, or, as Blondin said, "Wee peegs in clover," after ambushing and looting a caravan.

Between Amang and Illigh lie the bones of Jacques Lejaune, who was shot by Blondin. As they passed out of the dark and gloomy shade of a great cedar forest, there was a sudden roar, and a lioness flung herself from a rock upon Lejaune's camel. Lejaune was leading

as the sun had set. Blondin, who was behind him, fired quickly, and the bullet struck him in the spine and passed out through his shattered breast-bone. He had been getting "difficult" and too fond of giving himself airs on the strength of his navigating ability, and, moreover, Monsieur Blondin had learnt to steer by the stars, having located the polar star by means of the Great Bear.

It was a sad "accident," but Blondin had evidently recovered his spirits by morning, as he was singing again.

He sang—

> "Six little Légionnaires
> Still all alive,
> But one grew *indiscipliné*—
> And then there were *Five*." . . .

Distinctly of a *galégeade* wit and a *macabre* humour was Monsieur Blondin, and even as his eye roamed over the scrubby hill-sides and he thought fondly of the *mussugues*, the cistus-scrub hillocks of his dear Provence, he calculated the total sum of money now divided among the said Five, and reflected that division, where money is concerned, is deplorable. Also, as he gazed upon the tracts of thorn that recalled the *argeras* of Hyères, he decided that, all things considered, it would be as well

for him to reach Marakesh alone. He understood the principle of rarity-value, and knew that either one of two new-comers would not fetch a quarter of the price of a single newcomer to a war-harassed Sultan whose crying need was European drill-sergeants and centurions.

Jean Blondin would rise to be a second Kaid McLeod, and would amass vast wealth to boot. . . .

At Aït-Ashsba, bad luck overtook Ramon Diego. At the *fondouk* he smote a burly negro of Sokoto who jostled him. The negro, one of a band of departing wayfarers, was a master of the art of *rabah*, the native version of *la savate*, and landed Ramon a most terrible kick beneath the breast-bone. As he lay gasping and groaning for breath, the negro whipped out his razor-edged yataghan and bent over the prostrate man. Holding aloof, Blondin saw the negro spit on the back of Ramon Diego's neck, and with his finger draw a line thereon. Stepping swiftly back, the gigantic black then smote with all his strength, and the head of Ramon Diego rolled through the doorway and down the stony slope leading from the *fondouk*. As the negro mounted his swift Filali camel, Blondin investigated the contents of a leather

bag which Ramon always wore at the girdle, beneath his *haik*. On being told of the mishap, Jean Kebir was all for pursuit and vengeance. This, Blondin vetoed sternly. There were now only four of them, and henceforth they must walk delicately and be *miskeen*, modest, humble men. Only four now!

> "Five little Légionnaires,
> Each man worth a score;
> But a big nigger 'it one—
> And then there were *Four*,"

sang Monsieur Blondin.

But what a four! Jean Kebir, the genuine local article, more or less; Hassan Moghrabi, near his native heath and well in the picture; Mohamed the Turk, a genuine Mussulman, able to enter any mosque or *kuba* and display his orthodoxy; and himself, a pious man hooded to the eyes, under a vow of silence.

In due course, the Four reached the Adrar highlands, and tasted of the hospitality of this grim spot, with its brigands' *agadirs* or castles of stone. Having no *mezrag*, no token of protection from some Chief of Many Tents, and the thrifty Blondin refusing Kebir's request to be permitted to buy one, they had to trust to speed and secrecy. As it was, a band swooping down upon them from an *agadir* (obviously

of Phœnician origin), pursued them so closely and successfully, that Mohamed, the worst mounted, bringing up the rear, was also brought to earth by a lance thrust through his back and ended his career hanging by the flesh of his thigh from a huge hook which protruded from the wall above the door of the *agadir*.

Though greatly incensed at the loss of the Turk's camel and cash, Monsieur Blondin was soon able to sing again.

> "Four little Légionnaires
> Out upon the spree,
> The Adrar robbers caught one—
> And soon there were *Three*," . . .

he chanted merrily.

As the Three watched some hideous Aïssa dervishes dancing on glowing charcoal, skewering their limbs and cheeks and tongues, eating fire, and otherwise demonstrating their virtue one night, near El Goundafi, a *djemel*, thrusting forth his head and twisting his snaky neck, neatly removed the right knee-cap of Hassan Moghrabi, and he was of no further use to Monsieur Blondin. He was left behind, and died in a ditch some three days later, of loss of blood, starvation, gangrene, and grief.

Clearly Jean Blondin was reserved for great things. Here were the Ten reduced to Two.

and of those two he was one—and intended to be the only one when he was safe in Maroc. Singing blithely, he declared that—

> "Three little Légionnaires
> Nearly travelled through,
> When a hungry camel ate one—
> And now there are but *Two*." . . .

On through the beautiful Adrar, past its forests of arbutus, lentisk, thuya, figs, pines, and palmettos to its belt of olive groves, walnut, and almond; on toward Djebel Tagharat, the Lord of the Peaks, the Two-Headed. On through the Jibali country, called the "Country of the Gun" by the Arabs, as it produces little else for visitors, toward the Bled-el-Maghzen, the "Government's Territory," experiencing many and strange adventures and hair-breadth escapes. And, all the way, Jean Kebir served his colleague and leader well, and often saved him by his ready wit, knowledge of the country and the *sabir*, and his good advice.

And in time they reached the gorge of Wad Nafiz, and rode over a carpet of pimpernels, larkspur, gladiolus, hyacinths, crocuses, wasp-orchids, asphodels, cyclamens, irises, and musk-balsams; and Blondin realized that it was time for Jean Kebir to die, if he were to ride to

Marakesh alone and to inherit the whole of what remained of the money looted in the fifteen-hundred-mile journey, that was now within fifteen hours of its end. . . .

He felt quite sad as he shot the sleeping Jean Kebir that night, but by morning was able to sing—

> "Two little Légionnaires
> Travelling with the sun,
> Two was one too many—
> So now there is but *One*,"

and remarked to his camel, "'*Finis coronat opus*,' *mon gars*." . . .

Even as he caught sight, upon the horizon, of the sea of palms in which Marakesh is bathed, he was aware of a rush of yelling, gun-firing, white-clad lunatics bearing down upon him. . . . A Moorish *harka*! Was this a *lab-el-baroda*, a powder-play game—or what? They couldn't be shooting at *him*. . . . What was that Kebir had said? . . . "The Moors are the natural enemies of the Arabs. We must soon get Moorish garb or hide"—when . . . a bullet struck his camel and it sprawled lumberingly to earth. Others threw up spouts of dust. Blondin sprang to his feet and shouted. Curse the fools for thinking him an Arab! *Oh, for the faithful Jean Kebir to shout to them in the* sabir *lingua*

franca! . . . A bullet struck him in the chest. Another in the shoulder. He fell.

As the Moors gathered round to slice him in strips with flissa, yataghan, and sword, they found that their prey was apparently expending his last breath in prayers and pæans to Allah. He gasped:

> "One little Légionnaire,
> To provide *le bon Dieu* fun,
> Was killed because he killed his friend—
> And now there are *None.*" . . .

There were.

Decidedly of a *galégeade* wit and a *macabre* humour to the very last—ce bon Jean Blondin. "*Que voulez-vous? C'est la Légion!*" . . .

II

À LA NINON DE L'ENCLOS

IT was one of La Cigale's good days, and the poor "Grasshopper" was comparatively sane. He was one of the most remarkable men in the French Foreign Legion in that he was a perfect soldier, though a perfect lunatic for about thirty days in the month. When not a Grasshopper (or a Japanese lady, a Zulu, an Esquimaux dog or a Chinese mandarin) he was a cultured gentleman of rare perception, understanding, and sympathy. He had been an officer in the Belgian Corps of Guides, and military attaché at various courts. . . .

From a neighbouring group talking to Madame la Cantinière, in the canteen, came the words, clearly heard, "*Ah! Oui! Oui! Dans la Rue des Tournelles.*" . . .

"Now, why should the words 'Rue des Tournelles' bring me a distinct vision of the Café Marsouins in Hanoï by the banks of the

Red River in Tonkin?" asked the Grasshopper a minute later, in English.

"Can't tell you, Cigale; there is no such *rue* in Hanoï," replied Jean Boule.

"No, *mon ancien*," agreed the Grasshopper, "but there was Fifi Fifinette's place. Aha! I have it!"

"Then give us a bit of it, Cocky," put in 'Erb (le Légionnaire 'Erbiggin—one, Herbert Higgins from Hoxton).

"Yep—down by the factory, near Madame Ti-Ka's joint, it were," observed the Bucking Bronco.

"Aha! I have it. I remember me why the words 'Rue des Tournelles' reminded me all suddenly of the Café Marsouins in Hanoï," continued the Grasshopper. "It was there that I heard from Old Dubeque the truth of the story of Ninon Dürlonnklau, who was Fifi Fifinette's predecessor. She was a reincarnation of Ninon de l'Enclos, and of course Ninon dwelt in the Rue des Tournelles in Old Paris a few odd centuries back."

"Did they call the gal Neenong de Longclothes because she wore tights, Ciggy?" inquired 'Erb.

"Put me wise to Neenong's little stunts

before I hit it for the downy,"[1] requested the Bucking Bronco.

"Ninon de l'Enclos was a lady of the loveliest and frailest," said the Grasshopper. "Oh! but of a charm. *Ravissante!* She was, in her time, the well-beloved of Richelieu, Captain St. Etienne, the Marquis de Sevigné, Condé, Moissins, the Duc de Navailles, Fontenelle, Des Yveteaux, the Marquis de Villarceaux, St. Evrémonde, and the Abbé Chaulieu. On her eightieth birthday she had a devout and impassioned lover. On her eighty-fifth birthday the good Abbé wrote to her, 'Cupid has retreated into the little wrinkles round your undimmed eyes.'" . . .

"*Some* girl," opined the Bucking Bronco.

"And she lived in the Rue des Tournelles, and so the mention of that street called the Café Marsouins of Hanoï in Tonkin to my mind (for there did I hear the truth of the fate of Ninon Dürlonnklau, the predecessor of Fifi Fifinette whom some of us here knew). . . .

"And the chevalier de Villars, the son of Ninon de l'Enclos, was her lover also, not knowing that Ninon was his mother, nor she that de Villars was her son—until too late.

[1] Go to bed.

Outside her door a necromancer prophesied the death of de Villars to his face. An hour later Ninon knew by a birth-mark that de Villars was her son, and cried aloud, 'You are my son!' So he fulfilled the prophecy of the necromancer. He drove his dagger through his throat—just where this birth-mark was. What you call *mole,* eh? . . . Shame and horror? No . . . Love. They who loved Ninon de l'Enclos *loved.* Her arms or those of death. No other place for a lover of Ninon. You Anglo-Saxons could *never* understand. . . .

"And in Hanoï lived her reincarnation, Ninon Dürlonnklau, supposed to be the daughter of one Dürlonnklau, a German of the Legion, and of a perfect flower of a Lao woman. And, mind you, *mes amis,* there is nothing in the human form more lovely than a beautiful Lao girl from Upper Mekong.

"And *this* Ninon! Beautiful? Ah, my friends—there are no words. Like yourselves, I seek not the bowers of lovers—but I have the great love of beauty, and I have seen Ninon Dürlonnklau. Would I might have seen Ninon de l'Enclos that I might judge if she were one half so lovely and so fascinating. And when I first beheld the Dürlonnklau she was no *jeune fille.* . . .

" She had been the well-beloved of governors, generals, and officials and officers—and there had been catastrophes, scandals, suicides . . . the usual *affaires*—before she became the hostess of legionaries, marsouins,[1] sailors. . . .

" She had herself not wholly escaped the tragedy and grief that followed in her train, for at the age of seventeen she had a son, and that son was kidnapped when at the age that a babe takes the strongest grip upon a mother's heart and love and life. . . . And after a madness of grief and a long illness, she plunged the more recklessly into the pursuit of that pleasure and joy that must ever evade the children of pleasure, *les filles de joie*."

'Erb yawned cavernously.

" Got a gasper, Farver ? " he inquired of John Bull.

The old soldier produced a small packet of vile black Algerian cigarettes from his *képi*, without speaking.

" Quit it, Dub ! " snapped the deeply interested Bucking Bronco. " *Pro*duce silence, and then some, or beat it." [2]

" Awright, Bucko," mocked the unabashed 'Erb, imitating the American's nasal drawl and borrowing from his vocabulary. " You

[1] Colonial infantry. [2] Go away.

ain't got no call ter git het up none, thataway. Don't yew git locoed an rip-snort—'cos I guess I don' stand fer it, any."

"Stop it, 'Erb," said John Bull, and 'Erb stopped it. There would be trouble between these two one hot day. . . .

"The Legion appropriated her to itself at last," continued the Grasshopper, "and picketed her house. Marsouins, sailors, *pékins* [1] —all ceased to visit her. It was more than their lives were worth, and there were pitched battles when whole *escouades* of *ces autres* tried to get in, before it was clearly understood that Ninon belonged to the Legion. And this was meat and drink to Ninon. She loved to be La Reine de la Légion Étrangère. This was not Algiers, mark you, and she had been born and bred in Hanoï. She had not that false perspective that leads the women of the West to prefer those of other Corps to the sons of La Légion. And there were one or two moneyed men hiding in our ranks just then. She loved one for a time and then another for a time, and frequently the previous one would act rashly. Some took their last exercise in the Red River. An unpleasant stream in which to drown.

[1] Civilians.

"Then came out, in a new draft, young Villa, supposed to be of Spanish extraction—but he knew no Spanish. I think he was the handsomest young devil I have ever seen. He had coarse black hair that is not of Europe, wild yellow eyes, and a curious, almost gold complexion. He was a strange boy, and of a temperament decidedly, and he loved flowers as some women do—especially ylang-ylang, jasmine, magnolia, and those of sweet and sickly perfume. He said they stirred his blood, and his pre-natal memories. . . .

"And one night old Dubeque took him to see La Belle Dürlonnklau.

"As he told it to me I could see all that happened, for old Dubeque had the gift of speech, imagination, and the instinct of the drama. . . . Old Dubeque—the drunken, depraved scholar and *gentilhomme*.

"Outside her door a begging soothsayer whined to tell their fortunes. It was the Annamite New Year, the Thêt, when the native *must* get money somehow for his sacred jollifications. This fellow stood making the humble *laï* or prolonged salaam, and at once awoke the interest of young Villa, who tossed him a piastre.

"Old Dubeque swears that, as he grabbed

it, this *diseur de bonne aventure,* a scoundrel of the Delta, said, 'Missieu French he die to-night,' or words to that effect in pigeon-French, and Villa rewarded the Job-like Annamite with a kick. . . . They went in. . . .

"As they entered the big room where were the Mekong girls and Madame Dürlonnklau, the boy suddenly stopped, started, stared, and stood with open mouth gazing at La Belle Ninon. He had eyes for no one else. She rose from her couch and came towards him, her face lit up and exalted. She led him to her couch and they talked. Love at first sight! *Love* had come to that so-experienced woman; to that wild *farouche* boy. Later they disappeared into an inner room. . . .

"Old Dubeque called for a bottle of wine, and drank with some of the girls.

"He does not know how much later it was that the murmur of voices in Madame's room ceased with a shriek of '*Mon fils,*' a horrid, terrific scream, and the sound of a fall.

"Old Dubeque was not so drunk but what this sobered him. He entered the room.

"Young Villa had fulfilled the prophecy of the necromancer. He had driven his bayonet through his throat—just where a large birth-mark was. What you call *mole,* eh? It was

exposed when his shirt-collar was undone. . . . Ninon Dürlonnklau lived long, may be still alive—anyhow, I know she lived long—in a *maison de santé.* Yes—a reincarnation. . . .

"That is of what the words *la Rue de Tournelles* reminded me."

"'Streuth!" remarked le Légionnaire 'Erbiggin, and scratched his cropped head.

III

AN OFFICER AND—A LIAR

LITTLE Madame Gallais was always a trifle inclined to the occult, to spiritualism, and to dabbling in the latest thing psychic and metaphysical. At home, in Marseilles, she was a prominent member and bright particular star of a *Cercle* which was, in effect, a Psychical Research Society. She complained that one of the drawbacks of accompanying her husband on Colonial service was isolation from these so interesting pursuits and people.

Successful and flourishing occultism needs an atmosphere, and it is difficult for a solitary crier in the wilderness to create one. However, Madame Gallais did her best. She could, and would, talk to you of your subliminal self, your subconscious ego, your true psyche, your astral body, and of planes. On planes she was quite at home. She would ask gay and sportive *sous-lieutenants*, fresh from the boulevards of Paris, as to whether they were medi-

umistic, or able to achieve clairvoyant trances. It is to be recorded that, at no dance, picnic, garden-party, "fiv' o'clock," or dinner did she encounter a French officer who confessed to being mediumistic or able to achieve clairvoyant trances.

Nor was big, fat Adjudant-Major Gallais any better than the other officers of the Legion and the *Infanterie de la Marine* and the *Tirailleurs Tonkinois* who formed the circle of Madame's acquaintance in Eastern exile. No—on the contrary, he distinctly inclined to the materialistic, and preferred red wines to blue-stockings—(not blue silk stockings, *bien entendu*). For mediums and ghost-seers he had an explosive and jeering laugh. For vegetarians he had a contempt and pity that no words could express.

A teetotaller he regarded as he did a dancing dervish.

He had no use for ascetics and self-deniers, holding them mad or impious.

No, it could not be said that Madame's husband was mediumistic or able to achieve clairvoyant trances, nor that he was a tower of strength and a present help to her in her efforts to create the atmosphere which she so desired.

When implored to gaze with her into the crystal, he declared that he saw things that brought the blush of modesty to the cheek of Madame.

When begged to take a hand at " planchette " writing, he caused the innocent instrument to write a naughty *guinguette* rhyme, and to sign it Eugénie Yvette Gallais.

When besought to witness the wonders of some fortune-teller, seer, astrologer or *yogi*, he put him to flight with fearful grimaces and gesticulations.

And this was a great grief unto Madame, for she loved astrologers and fortune-tellers in spite of all, or rather of nothing. And yet *malgré* the fat Adjudant-Major's cynicism and hardy scepticism, the very curious and undeniable fact remained, that Madame had the power to influence his dreams. She could, that is to say, make him dream of her, and could appear to him in his dreams and give him messages. The Adjudant-Major admitted as much, and thus there is no question as to the fact. (Indeed, when Madame died in Marseilles many years later, he announced the fact to us in Algeria, more than forty-eight hours before he received confirmation of what he knew to be the truth of his dream.)

Two people less alike than the gallant Adjudant-Major and his wife you could not find. Perhaps that is why they loved each other so devotedly.

"I wonder if my boy will be mediumistic," murmured little Madame Gallais, as she hung fondly over the cot in which reposed little Edouard André. "Oh, to be able to hold communion with him when we are parted and I am in the spirit-world."

"Give the little *moutard* plenty of good meat," said the big man. "We want *le petit Gingembre* to be a heavy-weight—a born and bred cuirassier." . . .

"*Mon ange*, do you see any reason why twin souls, united in the bonds of purest love and closest relationship, should not be able to communicate quite freely when far apart?" Madame Gallais would reply.

"Save postage, in effect?" grinned the Adjudant-Major.

"I mean by medium of rappings, 'planchette,' dreams—if not by actual appearance and communication in spirit guise?"

"Spirit guys?" queried the stronger and thicker vessel.

"Yes, my soul, spirit guise."

"Oh, ah, yes. . . . Better not let me catch

the young devil in spirit guise, or I'll teach him to stick to good wine and carry it like a gentleman. . . . He must learn his limit. . . . How soon do you think we could put him into neat little riding-breeches? . . . Cavalry for him. . . . Not but what the Legion is the finest regiment in the world. . . . Still Cuirassiers for him."

"My Own! Let the poor sweet angel finish with his first petticoats before we talk of riding-breeches. . . . And how, pray, would the riding-breeches accord with his so-beautiful long curls. They would not, *mon ange, n'est ce pas?*" . . .

"No—but surely the curls can be cut off in a very few moments, can't they?" argued the Major, with the conscious superiority of the logical sex.

But she, of the sex that needs no logic, only smiled and replied that she would project herself into her son's dreams every night of his life.

And in the fulness of time, Edouard André having arrived at boy's estate, the curse of the Colonial came upon little Madame Gallais, and she had to take her son home to France and leave him there with her heart and her health and her happiness. She, in her misery,

could conceive of only one fate more terrible —separation from her large, dull husband, whom she adored for his strength, placidity, courage, adequacy, and, above all, because he adored her. Separation from him would be death, and she preferred the half-death of separation from *le petit Gingembre.*

She wrote daily to him on her return to Indo-China—printing the words large and clear for his easier perusal and, at the end of each weekly budget, she added a postscript asking him whether he dreamed of mother often. She also wrote to her own mother by every mail, each letter containing new and fresh suggestions for his mental, moral, and physical welfare, in spite of the fact that the urchin already received the entire devotion, care, and love of the little household at Marseilles.

Their unceasing, ungrudging devotion, care and love, however, did not prevent a gentle little breeze from springing up one summer evening, from bulging the bedroom window-curtain across the lighted gas-jet, and from acting as the first cause of poor little Edouard André being burnt to death in his bed, before a soul was aware that the tall, narrow house was on fire.

Big Adjudant-Major Gallais was in a terrible quandary and knew not what to do. He had but little imagination, but he had a mighty love for his wife—and she was going stark, staring mad before his haggard eyes. . . . And, if she died, he was going to take ship from Saigon and just disappear overboard one dark night, quietly and decently, like a gentleman, with neither mess, fuss, nor post-mortem *enquête*.

But there was just a ghost of a chance, a shadow of a hope—this "planchette" notion that had come to him suddenly in the dreadful sleepless night of watching. . . . It could not make things worse—and it might bring relief, the relief of tears. If she could weep she could sleep. If she could sleep she could live, perhaps—and the Major swallowed hard, coughed fiercely, and scrubbed his bristly head violently with both big hands.

It would be a lying fraud and swindle; but what of that if it might save her life and reason—and he was prepared to forge a cheque, cheat at cards, or rob a blind Chinese beggar of his last *sabuk*, to give her a minute's comfort, rest, and peace. . . . For clearly she must weep or die, sleep or die, unless she were to lose her reason—and while she was in an asylum he could not take that quiet dive overboard so

that they could all be together again in the keeping and peace of *le bon Dieu*. . . . Rather death than madness, a thousand times. . . . But if she died and he took steps to follow her —was there not some talk about suicides finding no place in Heaven ?

Peste ! What absurdity ! For surely *le bon Père* had as much sense of fair-play and mercy as a battered old soldier-man of La Légion ? But it had not come to that yet. The Legion does not surrender—and the Adjudant-Major of the First Battalion of The Regiment had still a *ruse de guerre* to try against the enemy. He would do his best with this "planchette" swindle, and play it for what it was worth. While there is life there is hope, and he had been in many a tight place before, and fought his way out.

To think of Edouard André Lucien Gallais playing with "planchette" ! She had often begged him to join hands with her on its ebony board, and to endeavour to "get into communication" with the spirits of the departed —but he had always acted the *farceur*.

"Ask the sacred thing to tip us the next Grand Prix winner," he had said, or "But, yes—I would question the kind spirits as to the address of the pretty girl I saw at the

station yesterday," and then he would cause the innocent machine to say things most unspiritual. Well—now he would see what sort of lying cheat he could make of himself. To lie is not gentlemanly—but to save life and reason is. If to lie is to blacken the soul—let the soul of Adjudant-Major Gallais be black as the blackest *ibn Eblis*, if thereby an hour's peace might descend upon the tortured soul of his wife. The good Lord God would understand a gentleman—being one Himself.

And the Major, large, heavy, and slow-witted, entered his wife's darkened room, and crept toward the bed whereon she lay, dry-eyed, talking aloud and monotonously.

". . . To play such a trick on me! May Heaven reward those who play tricks. Of course, it is a hoax—but why does not mother cable back that there never was any fire at all, and that she knows nothing about the telegram? . . . How could *le petit Gingembre* be dead, when there he is, in the photo, smiling at me so prettily, and looking so strong and well? What a fool I am! Anyone can play tricks on me. People *do*. . . . I shall tell my husband. He would never play a trick on me, nor allow such a thing. . . . A trick! A hoax! . . . Of course, one can judge nothing from the

handwriting of a telegram. Anybody could forge one. A letter would be so difficult to forge. . . . The sender of that wicked cable said to himself, 'Madame Gallais cannot pretend that the message does not come from her mother on grounds of the handwriting being different from that of her mother—because the writing is never that of the sender, but that of the telegraph-clerk. She will be deceived and think that her mother has really sent it.' . . . How unspeakably cruel and wicked! No, a letter could not be forged, and that is why there is no letter. Let them wait until my husband can get at them. *Mon petit Gingembre!* And it is his birthday in a month. . . . What shall I get for him? I cannot make up my mind. One cannot get just what one wants out here, and if one sends the money for something to be bought at Home, it is not the same thing—it does not seem to the child as though his parents sent it at all. How lucky I am to have mother to leave him to. She simply worships him, and he couldn't have a happier time, nor better treatment, if I were there myself. No—that's just it—the happier a child is the less it needs you, and you wouldn't have it unhappy so that it *did* want you. How the darling will . . ." and then again rose the

awful wailing cry as consciousness of the terrible truth, the cruel loss, the horrible fate, and the sensation of utter impotence of the bereaved, surged over the wearied, failing brain. She must cry or die.

The Major sat beside her and gently patted her, in his dull yearning to help, to relieve the dreadful agony, to do something.

A gust of rebellious rage shook him, and he longed to fight and to kill. Why was he smitten thus, and why was there no tangible opponent at whom he could rush, and whom he could hew and hack and slay? He rose to his feet, with clenched fists uplifted, and purpling face.

"Be calm," he said, and took a hold upon himself.

Useless to attempt to fight Fate or the Devil or whatever it was that struck you from behind like this, stabbed you in the back, turned life to dust and ashes. . . . He must grin and bear it like a man. Like a man—and what of the woman?

"He's happy now, *petit*, our *petit Gingembre*," said the poor wretch.

"He's just a jolly little angel, having a fête-day of a time. He's not weeping and unhappy. Not he, *peaudezébie!*"

"Burning!" screamed the woman. "My baby is burning! My *petit Gingembre* is burning, and no one will help him. . . . My baby is burning and Heaven looks on! Oh, mother! —Annette!—Marie!—Grégoire!—rush up to the bedroom! . . . Quick—he is burning! The curtain is on fire. The blind has caught. . . . The dressing-table is alight. . . . The blind has fallen on the bed. His pillow is smouldering. He is suffocating. The bed is on fire . . ." and scream followed heartrending scream.

The stricken husband seized the woman's hands and kissed them.

"No, *petit*, he never woke. He never felt anything. He just passed away to *le bon Dieu* in his sleep, without pain or fright, or anything. He just died in his sleep. There is no pain at all about that sort of suffocation, you know," he said.

"Oh, if I could but think so!" moaned the woman. "If I could only for a moment think so! . . . Burning to death and screaming for mother. . . . Edouard! Shoot me—shoot me! Or let me . . ."

"See, Beloved of my Soul," urged her husband, gently shaking her. "I do solemnly swear that I know he was not hurt in the least. He never woke. I happen to know

it. I am not saying it to comfort you. I *know* it."

"How could you know, Edouard? . . . Oh, my little baby, my little son! Oh, wake me from this awful *cauchemar*, Edouard. Say I am dreaming and am going to wake."

"The little chap's gone, darling, but he went easy, and he's well out of this cursed world, anyhow. He'll never have suffering and unhappiness. . . And he had such a happy little life." . . .

Then, for the first time in his career, the Major waxed eloquent, and, for the first time in his life, lied fluently and artistically. "I wonder if you'll believe me if I tell you how I *know* he wasn't hurt," he continued. "It's the truth, you know. I wouldn't lie to you, would I?"

"No, you wouldn't deceive me, and you haven't the wit if you would," replied his wife.

"No, dearest, that's just it. I wouldn't and couldn't, as you say. Well, look here, last night the little chap appeared to me. *Le petit Gingembre* himself! Faith of a gentleman, he did. . . . I may have been asleep, but he appeared to me as plain as you are now. . . . As pretty, I mean," he corrected with

a heavy, anxious laugh and pat, peering into the drawn and disfigured face to see if his words reached the distraught mind, "and he said, 'Father, I want to speak to mother, and she cannot hear because she cries out and screams and sobs. It makes me so wretched that I cannot bear it.'"

The man moistened parched lips with a leathery tongue.

"And he said, 'Tell her I was not hurt a little bit—not even touched by the flames. I just slept on, and knew nothing. . . . And I couldn't be happy, even in Heaven, while she grieves so.'"

The woman turned to him.

"Edouard, you are lying to me—and I am grateful to you. It is as terrible for you as for me," and she beat her forehead with clenched fists.

"Eugénie!" cried her husband. "Do you call me a liar! *Me?* Did I not give you my word of honour?"

"Aren't you lying, Edouard? *Aren't* you? . . . Don't deceive me, Edouard André Gallais!" and she seized his wrist in a grip that hurt him.

"I take my solemn oath I am not lying," lied the Major. "Heaven smite me if I am.

I swear I am speaking the absolute truth. *Nom de nom de Dieu!* Would I lie to you?"

He must convince her while she had the sanity to understand him. . . . "I believe you, Edouard. You are not deceiving me. Oh, thank God! I humbly thank the good merciful Father. And it was—it was—a real and actual communication, Edouard—and vouchsafed to you, the scoffer at spirit communication."

"Yes, but that's not all, my Eugénie. The little chap said, 'I cannot come to mother while she cries out and moans. Tell her to talk with me by "planchette," you joining with her.' He did," lied the Major.

"Oh! Oh! Edouard! Quick! Where is it? . . . Oh, my baby!" cried Madame Gallais, rising and rushing to a cabinet from which she produced a heart-shaped ebony board some ten inches long and six broad, having at the wide end two legs, an inch or so in length terminating in two swivelled ivory wheels, and, at the other end, a pencil of the same length as the legs.

Seating herself at her writing-table, she placed the instrument on a large sheet of paper, while her husband brought a chair to her side.

Both placed their hands lightly on the broad part of the board and awaited results.

The pencil did not stir.

Minute after minute passed.

The Adjudant-Major was a cunning man of war, and he was using all his cunning now.

The woman uttered a faint moan as the tenth minute ebbed away.

"Patience, Sweetheart," said he. "It's worth a fair trial and a little patience, isn't it?"

"Patience!" was the scornful reply. "I'll sit here till I die—or I'll hear from my boy. . . . You *didn't* lie to me, Edouard?"

The pencil stirred—stirred, moved, and stopped.

The woman groaned.

The pencil stirred again. Then it moved—moved and wrote rapidly, improving in pace and execution as the Major gained practice in pushing it without giving the slightest impression of using "undue influence."

His wife firmly and fanatically believed that the spirit of her child was actually present and utilizing, through their brains, the muscles of their arms, to convey to the paper the message it could neither speak nor write itself.

Presently the pencil ceased to move, and,

after another period of patient waiting, the stricken mother took the paper from beneath the instrument and read the " message " of the queer, wavering writing, feeble, unpunctuated, and fantastic, but quite legible, although conjoined.

" My Dearest Maman," it ran. " Why do you grieve so for me and make me so unhappy ? How can I be joyous when you are sad ? Let me be happy by being happy yourself. I cannot come to you while you mourn. Be glad, and let me be glad and then you must be more happy still, because I am happy. I never felt any pain at all. I just awoke to find myself here, where all would be joy for me, except for your grief. I have left a world of pain, to wait a little while for you where we shall be together in perfect happiness for ever. Let me be happy, dearest Maman, by being resigned, and then happy, yourself. When you are at peace I can come to you always in your dreams, and we can talk together. Give me happiness at once, darling Mother. Please do. Your *Petit Gingembre*" . . . which was not a bad effort for an unimaginative and dull-witted man.

He had his instant reward, for on finishing the reading of the " message," Madame Gallais threw her arms round his neck and burst into

tears—the life-giving, reason-saving, blessed relief of tears.

An hour later she slept, for the first time in five days, holding her husband's big hand as he sat by her bed.

When she stirred and relinquished it, the next morning, the Major arose and went out.

"What a sacred liar I am!" quoth he. "Garçon, bring me an *apéritif*."

It is notorious that a tangled web we weave when first we practise to deceive. And Major Gallais practised hard. Two and three and four times daily did he manufacture "messages." from the dead child, and strive, with his heart in his mouth, to make the successful cheat last until the first wild bitterness of his wife's grief had worn off.

His hair went grey in the course of a month.

The mental strain of invention, the agony of rasping his own cruel wound by this mockery —for he had loved *le petit Gingembre* as much as the child's mother had done—and the constant terror lest some unconvincing expression or some unguarded pressure on the "planchette" should betray him, were more exhausting and wearing than two campaigns against the "pirates" of Yen Thé.

But still he had his reward, for his wife's sane grief, heavy though it was and cruel, was a very different thing from the mad abandonment and wild insanity of those dreadful days before he had his great idea.

Many and frequent still were the dreadful throes of weeping and rebellions against Fate —but "planchette" could always bring distraction and comfort to the tortured mind, and the soothing belief in real presence and a genuine communion.

But there was no anodyne for the man's bitter grief, and the "planchette" became a hideous nightmare to him. Even his work was no salvation to him, for though the *Adjudant-Major* is a regimental staff officer, corresponding somewhat to our Adjutant—(the "Adjudant" is a non-com. in the French army) —and a very busy man, Gallais found that his routine duties were performed mechanically, and by one side of his brain as it were, while, undimmed, in the fore-front of his mind, blazed the baleful glare of a vast "planchette," in the flames of which his little son roasted and shrieked.

And still the daily tale of "messages" must be invented, and daily grew a greater and more distressing burden and terror.

How much longer could he go on, day after

day, and several times a day, producing fresh communications, conversations, messages, ideas? How much longer could he go on inventing plausible and satisfactory answers to the questions that his wife put to the "spirit" communicant? How could Adjudant-Major Gallais of La Légion Étrangère describe Heaven and the environment, conditions, habits, conduct and conversations of the inhabitants of the Beyond? How much longer would he be able to use the jargon of his wife's books on Occultism and Spiritualism, study them as he might, without rousing her suspicions? The swindle could not have lasted a day had she not been only too anxious to believe, and only too ready to be deceived.

What would be the end of it all? What would his wife do if she found out that he had cheated her? Would she ever forgive him? Would she leave him? Would the shock of the disappointment kill her? Would she ever believe him again?

What *could* the end of it be?

He must stick it out—for life, if need be—and he was not an imaginative man.

What would be the end?

The end was—that she felt she must go

home to France and see her boy's grave, tend it, pray by it, and give such comfort as she could to her poor mother, almost as much to be pitied as herself.

Gallais encouraged the idea. The change would be good for her, and he would be able to join her in a few months. Also this terrible " planchette " strain would cease for him, and he might recover his sleep and appetite. . . .

" To think that we shall be parted, this time to-morrow, my dearest Edouard," wept Madame Gallais, as they sat side by side in their bed-sitting-room, in the *Hôtel de la République* at Saigon. " I on the sea and you on your way back alone. If everything were not arranged, I would not go. Let us have a last ' planchette ' with our son, and get to bed. We are having *petit déjeuner* at five, you know."

The Major racked his brain for something to write, as Madame went to her dressing-case for the little instrument (to the Major, an instrument of torture)—racked his brain for something he had not said before, and racked in vain. He grew hotter and hotter and broke into a profuse perspiration as she seated herself beside him. *Nom de nom de Dieu de Dieu de sort!* What could he write? Why had his brain ceased to operate?

Nombril de Belzébuth! Could he not make up one more lie after carrying on for weeks—weeks during which his waking hours—riding, drilling, marching along the muddy causeways between the rice-fields, working in his office, inspecting, eating, and drinking—had been devoted to hatching "messages," conversations, communications and lies, till he had lost health, weight, sleep, and appetite. . . .

No. . . . He could not write a single word, for his mind was absolutely blank.

Minutes passed.

Sweating, cursing, and praying, the unfortunate man sat in an agony of misery, and could not write a single word.

Would not *le bon Dieu* help him? Just this one last time? . . .

Minutes passed.

Not to have saved his life, not to have saved the life of his wife, not to have brought back *le petit Gingembre*, could the poor tortured wretch have written a single word. . . . What would his wife do when she discovered the cheat—for if no words came during the next minute or two he knew he must spring to his feet, make full confession, and throw himself upon his wife's mercy.

That or go mad.

What would she do? . . . . Leave him for ever? . . . Spit upon him and call him "Liar," "Cheat," and "Heartless, cruel villain"?

Would the dreadful reaction and shock kill her?—deprive her of reason?

Suddenly he perceived that, with hands which were acres in extent, he was endeavouring to move a "planchette" the size of Indo-China—a "planchette" that was red-hot and of which the fire burnt into his brain. Its smoke and fumes were choking him; its fierce white light was blinding him; the thing was killing him.

By the time, several weeks later, that little Madame Gallais had nursed her husband back to sanity and consciousness, the first bitterness of grief was past and she herself could play the comforter.

"Oh, my Edouard," she wept upon his shoulder when first the brain-fever left him and he knew her, "we have lost our little Gingembre—but you have me, and, oh, my brave hero-husband, I have you. I shall weep no more." . . .

"Planchette" stands on Madame's desk—but she does not use it.

IV

THE DEAD HAND

CHUBBY, cherubic, and cheerful, with the pure, wholesome blood of his native Provence yet glowing in his cheeks, Extreme Youth was the only trouble really—and there are many worse diseases—of Lieutenant Archambaut Thibaut d'Amienville of the Chasseurs d'Afrique, of the glorious XIXth Army Corps of La République Française.

As he sat back from the table, fingering his glass, he looked exceedingly handsome, dashing, and romantic in his beautiful pale blue uniform. But he had not found his level, and he was making some bad breaks. It does not always conduce to modesty and diffidence in a young man that his papa is a very prominent and powerful politician, and his mother a leader of Paris Society. As the deft native waiters, arrayed in spotless white, moved the table-cloth and set forth fresh glasses, ash-trays, shapely bottles and cigar-

ette-boxes on the shining mahogany that reflected the electric lights like a mirror, he rushed in once again. There was no squashing him.

One has heard of people being young enough to know better—young enough, that is, to have high ideals, generosity, and purity of motive—but Lieutenant Archambaut Thibaut d'Amienville was young enough to know best. He was so young, so wise, and so well informed that he was known as *Général* and not *Lieutenant* d'Amienville among his intimates. And he was at the moment giving generously and freely to his seniors of the stores of his wisdom and knowledge.

Captain Gautier d'Armentières, of the First Battalion of La Légion Étrangère, scarred and war-worn hero of Tonquin, Dahomey, and Madagascar, beloved as few officers are beloved by the wild and desperate men he led, fine soldier and fine gentleman, remarked to the officer on his left—a gorgeous Major of Spahis, resplendent in scarlet cloak (huddled in which he shivered with fever), *ceinturon*, and full baggy trousers:

"So you are going to have another try for a lion?" But the Major had no time to reply for "Général" d'Amienville had caught the

ultimate word. (He had promised his mamma a select consignment of lion-skins of his own procuring when he left for the wilds of Algiers and the Soudan, and she had helped in the purchase of the battery of sporting weapons that he had bought at the gun-shop in the Rue de la Paix, guiding his taste to the choice of "pretty ones with nice water-marking on the barrels," and dainty ornament in the way of engraving, chasing, damascening and mounting.)

"Lion?" said he quickly. "What you want for lion, d'Armentières, is impact, concussion, force—er—weight, a-ah-stunning blow. . . . It is absolutely useless, you know, for you to go and drill him through and through with neat little holes of which he is unaware, and which trouble him not at all. . . . None of your Mausers or Lebels, you know." . . .

Eight pairs of eyes regarded the young gentleman without enthusiasm or affection; nay, with positive coldness.

The strong and clever face of one of the party, a Captain of Zouaves, looked somewhat Machiavellian, as, with a cold smile, he encouragingly murmured "Yes?"

Colonel Leon Lebrun, famous chief of Tirailleurs and old enough to have been the young gentleman's grandfather, assumed a Paul-at-

the-feet-of-Gamaliel air, and with humility also said " Yes ? "

" Yes," continued d'Amienville, " never take one of these small-bore toys, no matter what the muzzle-velocity. Get something with a good fat bore and a good fistful of cordite. Then you know where you are and what you are doing. . . . I'd as soon go with my automatic pistol as with a small-bore. . . . And never go on foot—especially in those reedy places. And never touch a *tablier*—what the English call a *machan* when they put them up for tiger in their Indian colonies. . . . No good. . . . Suicide in fact. . . . What you want to do is to have a platform—like a sentry's *vue*—strongly lashed in the branches of a convenient high tree, near the 'kill,' put a mattress on it, and make yourself comfortable."

" And if, in effect, there be no tree ? " respectfully inquired Médecin-Major Parme, twirling his huge moustache without revealing the expression on his thin lips.

" Oh - er - well, then, of course, you might—er—well, perhaps dig a pit and fence yourself round. You might, in fact, have a sort of cage. . . . Just as good for keeping wild beasts out as for keeping them in."

" Excellent ! " murmured the Colonel.

"Now *I* should never have thought of going lion-hunting in a cage. But original! Original! Of a cleverness! . . . How many lions have you shot?"

The flush of embarrassment deepened that of youth and juiciness in the plump cheek of the young officer.

"Oh - er - well, I have never actually *shot* any, you know," he replied, in some confusion, but still with a suggestion of having done something very similar—of having ridden them down with a hog-spear, or caught them on a rod and line.

"*Haven't* you?" asked Captain d'Armentières in apparent surprise. From the discomfort of his confession the youth quickly recovered with the attempted *tu quoque*—

"Have *you*?"

"Yes," admitted the Captain, hesitatingly.

"*Oh?*—and when did *you* shoot one, pray?" inquired d'Amienville, with a sceptical note, sufficiently impertinent to be irritating.

The Captain's uniform of dark blue and red was a very modest affair beside that of the young Chasseur—and, *nom de Dieu!* who was *he* to attempt a sneer at the son of Madame d'Amienville—not to mention of Monsieur d'Amienville, politician of international fame and importance?

The young officer raised his absinthe to the light, crossed a leg, admired a neat boot, and glanced a trifle disdainfully at the grizzled, unfashionable old *barbare* of whom the elegant salons of Paris had never heard. (A mere St. Maizent man snubbing an alumnus of St. Cyr !)

" My last, about this time last year," was the reply.

" Your *last* ? And how many, pray, have you shot ? " asked d'Amienville languidly.

" *Eighty-three,*" replied the officer of the Legion, fixing a bleak and piercing grey eye upon the youth.

Wry smiles wreathed the faces of the audience, and the " Général " changed the subject forthwith. As the fresh and verdant one was their fellow-guest (of d'Armentières), the others forebore to laugh aloud.

Drawing a bow at a venture, the Lieutenant had a shot at the horse, he having just purchased his very first pony.

" Excellent riding country, this," he observed patronizingly to his neighbour, a hard-bitten, saturnine officer, hawk-eyed, hawk-nosed, and leathern-cheeked. " I shall do a lot of it. . . . Very keen on riding and awfully fond of horses. I love the *chasse au renard*. . . . Ah ! Horses ! I know something about them too.

. . . A thing most useful—to understand horses. It is not given to all. . . . Incredible lot to learn though. . . . A difficult subject. . . . Difficult." . . .

"Very," acquiesced the neighbour, finding himself the more immediate recipient of the information.

"But yes—very. Any time you may be thinking of buying, let me know, and I shall be charmed to place my knowledge and experience at your disposal. Charmed. Yes, I will look the beast over. . . . Always best to take advice when buying a horse. Terrible rogues these Arabs. You are certain to be swindled if you rely on your own judgment. Cunning fellows these native *piqueurs*. Hide any defect from inexperienced eyes—bad hoofs, sand-crack, ring-bone, splint, wind-galls, *souffle*, sight, teeth, age, vice—anything. Charmed to give you my opinion at any time. . . . Try him for you too." . . .

"Most extremely amiable of you, I'm sure. *Most* kind. A thousand thanks. I realize I have a terrible lot to learn about horses yet," replied the favoured one.

"Yes, they take a lot of knowing," replied the "Général," and, as the man rose, bade farewell to his host, saluted the company, and

departed to catch the ten-fifteen to Oran, that young but knowing gentleman observed generously :

" An agreeable fellow that—a most amiable person. Who is he ? "

" Vétérinaire-Colonel Blois ! " replied d'Armentières. " Probably the cleverest veterinary-surgeon in the army. . . . You may know his standard work." . . . But Lieutenant d'Amienville again changed the subject hastily, and then scolded a servant for not bringing him what he had not ordered. Thereafter he was silent for nearly five minutes.

Some one mentioned Adjudant-Major Gallais and his curious end. (He dreamed that he saw his wife murdered by burglars in their little flat at Marseilles, was distraught until news came that such a tragedy had actually happened at the very time of the dream, and at once shot himself.)

" A very remarkable case of coincidence, to say the least of it," observed Captain d'Armentières. " Personally I should be inclined to call it something more."

But Lieutenant d'Amienville was a modern of the moderns, an agnostic, a sceptic.

" All bosh and rubbish," quoth he. " *Sottise.* . . . There is no such thing as this occultism,

spiritualism, telepathy, and twaddle. To the devil with supraliminal, transliminal, subliminal, astral, and supernatural. There *is* no supernatural." . . .

"So?" murmured a dapper little man in scarlet breeches and a black tunic which had the five-*galoned* sleeve of a Colonel.

"All nonsense," continued the young gentleman. "All this that one hears about mysterious and inexplicable occurrences is always second-hand. Second-hand and third person. . . . Third person singular—very singular. Ha! Ha! . . . Yes, all rot and rubbish. Now, has anyone of *us* here ever had an experience of the supernatural sort? Not one, I'll be bound. Not one. . . . But we all know somebody who has. It's always the way." . . .

"Well," remarked Captain d'Armentières, "I was once throttled by a Dead Hand—if you would call that an experience."

"I was speaking seriously," replied the Lieutenant loftily.

"So was I," answered the Captain coldly.

"What do you mean?" queried the youth, fearing the, to him, worst thing on earth—ridicule.

"Precisely what I say," was the quiet reply. "I was once seized by the throat, and all but

killed, by a Dead Hand, in the middle of the night as I lay in bed. . . . I give you my word of honour—and I request—and advise—you not to cast any doubt on my statement."

The pointed jaw of Lieutenant d'Amienville dropped, and he stared round-eyed and open-mouthed at the officer of the Legion, apparently sane and obviously sober, who could say such things seriously. . . . Could it be a case of this *cafard* of which he had heard so much? No—*le cafard* is practically confined to the rank and file—and this man was, moreover, as cool as a cucumber and as normal as the night. He glanced round the table at his fellow-guests. They looked expectant and interested. This *vieux moustache* was evidently a man of standing and consideration among them.

"Tell us the story, *mon gars*," said the Major of Spahis, pouring cognac into his coffee.

"Do," added the Captain of Zouaves.

"Let's go out into the garden and have it," proposed the Colonel of Tirailleurs Algériens, half rising. "May we, d'Armentières?"

"Yes—I must hear this," acquiesced the young Lieutenant with an air of open-mindedness, but reserved judgment.

"Come on, by all means," answered d'Armentières. "I should have thought of it before,

Colonel"; and the party rose and strolled across the veranda out into the garden of the *Cercle Militaire*.

Légionnaire Jean Boule, or John Bull, standing at the gate leading into the high-road, and awaiting his officer as patiently as a good orderly should, thought the scene extraordinarily stage-like and theatrical, albeit he had seen it many times before.

The brilliant moonlight on the tall and beautiful plane-trees, the cypress and the myrtle, the orange, magnolia, wistaria, bougainvillea, the ivy-draped building of the *Cercle* with its hundreds of lights, the gorgeous scarlet of the Spahi, the pale blue of the Chasseur, the yellow and blue of the Tirailleur, the scarlet and black of the Legionary, and the other gay uniforms made up a picture as unreal as beautiful.

Gazing upon it, he thought of days when he, too, sat in such groups in such club-gardens, when Life went very well.

In the distance, the famous band of the Legion was playing Gounod's *Serenade*—probably in the Public Gardens outside the Porte de Tlemçen. . . .

"*En avant, mon choux,*" said the Médecin-Major, as the party settled into wicker chairs, and the bare-footed, silent servants ministered

to its needs with cigarettes, cheroots, and weird liqueurs.

"And forthwith," added the Colonel, puffing a vast cloud as he lay back and gazed sentimentally at the moon.

"Well—as you like, gentlemen—but it was nothing. Just a queer little experience. It won't interest you much, I'm afraid," said d'Armentières.

Then Lieutenant d'Amienville commenced a dissertation upon auto-suggestion, illusion, and self-deception, but the remainder of Captain d'Armentières' guests intimated clearly to their host that they wanted his story, and wanted it at once.

"Have it for what it is worth, then," said that officer. "But I request Lieutenant d'Amienville clearly to understand that what I am about to tell you is *the absolute truth*—the plain and simple tale of what actually occurred to me personally. Moreover, should he, while believing in the honesty of my belief, doubt the trustworthiness of my observations and conclusions, I may mention that my *ordonnance* will be found waiting near the gate—and may be called and questioned. For he was concerned in the matter, and not only saw the marks upon my throat, but actually touched the Dead

Hand which all but choked the life out of me."

The voice of the " Général " was stilled within him, but his face was very eloquent indeed.

" It happened in Haiphong," continued the quiet, cultured voice of the weary-looking man, " when the Legion sent big drafts out to Tonkin in '83. I was commanding a detachment then, with the rank of Lieutenant. We had disembarked at the mouth of the Red River into two old three-decker river-gunboats, and I had had an infernally busy day—what with the debarkation from the ship and then again at Haiphong, after the six-hour journey up the river. On top of all I had high fever.

" Now, before getting into bed that night, I turned out the lamp that hung on a nail on the wall, and then lay down, finished my cigarette, and turned out the tiny hand-lamp which I had brought in from the bathroom and placed on the little *petit-déjeuner* table beside my bed, noting, as I did so, that the matches were beside it. I always lock my door at night and sleep without a light, but with the means of getting a light easily accessible. Funny things are apt to occur at night in some parts of the shiny East. . . . I expect they've got electric light in Haiphong by now. . . . Well, in two minutes I was sound asleep—sleeping the sleep of

the just and enjoying the reward of my good conscience, virtuous life, and hard work." . . .

"*Va t'en, blagueur*," murmured Colonel Lebrun with a smile.

"An hour or two later, I awoke suddenly—awoke to the knowledge that I was being murdered, was dying, and, in effect, very nearly dead. Some one had me by the throat and was choking my life out with as deadly and scientific a grip as ever fastened upon a man's neck. . . . The human mind is curiously constituted, and, even in that moment, I tried to remember the name of a book about the garotters of India, the 'Thugs'—a book I had read many years before, when studying English—written by a Colonel of the Army of India. . . . 'Chinese garotters,' thinks I to myself, and realized that I was in for it, for I could no more yell for assistance than I could fly. There was my orderly sleeping on a rug in a little ante-chamber a few feet from me, and I could not call to him. I must face my fate alone and live or die without help from outside. I was terrified." . . . .

One or two of his audience glanced at the medals and decorations on the speaker's breast (they included the *Croix de Guerre* and the *Médaille Militaire*) and smiled.

" I should have felt for his eyes and blinded him ! " announced Lieutenant d'Amienville.

. . . " Simultaneously with the awakening to the knowledge that I was being throttled by some silent, motionless, invisible assailant, came my attempt to strike him, of course—to spring up, and to grapple with him ; but, simultaneously again with the attempt, came the knowledge that my right arm was absolutely useless beneath his weight, and that I was pinned to the pillow, like a butterfly to a cork, by the weight and power of the hand that had me in its grip. Finding my right immovable, I naturally struck out with my left and hit again and again with all my strength—to find that I struck *nothing*—until, being at my last gasp, I grabbed at the hand that was choking me and strove to tear it from my throat.

" Even at that terrible moment I was startled at the extraordinary coldness of the hand I grasped. It was as deadly cold as it was horribly strong, and as brain reeled and senses failed, I seemed to visualize a terrible marble statue endowed with life and superhuman strength, leaning its cruel weight upon the frozen hand that clutched my throat. And I could not seize or even touch any part of this horrible assailant but the Hand. . . . And I

tell you the thing was dead—dead and cold. . . . I was dying—throttled by a Dead Hand, and that is the simple truth." . . .

None of the party moved or spoke—not even d'Amienville. That, and the fact that scarcely a cigar or cigarette remained alight, were remarkable tributes to d'Armentières' dramatic and convincing way of speech. And those of the party who knew him well, also knew him to be incapable of telling a lie, when he had given his word that what he said was the truth.

. . . " Well, I have never believed in taking things lying down, so I tried once again to get up, and, putting all my heart and soul and strength into a mighty heave, I strove to throw my assailant off before I lost consciousness completely. . . . In vain. . . .

" All this takes time in the telling, but it must have taken mighty little time in the doing, for I was almost dead from suffocation when I first awoke.

" As I strained and tore at the hand, I struggled to rise. My body writhed, but my right arm budged not a fraction of an inch, and the grip on my throat perceptibly tightened, though I thought the limit had surely been reached. . . . I must get one breath, or ears and eyes and brain must burst. . . . Surely I was black

in the face and my eyeballs were on my cheek-bones? . . . I lived a lifetime in a second. . . . So this was the end and the finish of Gautier d'Armentières, was it? Here were to end all dreams of military glory and distinction, all visions of fine, quick death in action against the foes of La France? . . . A dog's death! To be slowly suffocated in my bed—choked to death by a cold Dead Hand, a Hand without a tangible body. . . .

"As my frame was convulsed and my senses finally reeled in unconsciousness or death, I made my last wild attempt, and probably put forth such a violent concentration of co-ordinated effort as never before in my life—and, with a gasp and sob of thankfulness, I flung my assailant off!

"And, as he fell, he stabbed me in the arm.

"Yes—with the last vestige of my strength I flung it off, and the crash of falling lamp and table was the sweetest sound I ever heard, and the pain of the stab in my arm was absolutely welcome. . . . For I don't mind confessing that I prefer human, or rather *real*, antagonists when I have to fight—and when lamp and table smashed to the ground under its weight, and I felt myself knifed, I knew that this cold, dead hand belonged to something actual and tangible—something alive, something human. . . .

"But I have never touched anything that seemed more dead and cold, for all that.

"Well, my assailant was hardly on the ground before I was there too, for, although my right arm was absolutely useless from the stab, I meant to have him somehow. I hate being choked at night when I am getting my due and necessary sleep, and I wanted him badly. I was really annoyed about it all. . . .

"But he wasn't there, and, as I sprang to my feet and struck and grabbed and clutched, I clutched and grabbed and struck—precisely nothing!

"My terror returned tenfold. Was the Thing supernatural after all? I had fallen practically on top of it and actually holding it—and it *was not*. . . . But—nonsense! The most violent and virulent Oriental djinn, spirit, ghost, devil, afrit, *esprit malin*, or demon, does not stab one, even if it throttles—as some of them are said to do. . . .

"I crouched still and silent with restrained breathing, hoping to hear other breathing or some movement.

"Perfect silence and stillness!

"I burst into a cold perspiration—as I imagined the thing to be behind me, and about to seize my neck again in its frozen, vice-like grip.

"I whirled around with extended arms, and then, rising to my feet, struck out in every direction, dealing *coups de savate* when my arms tired. And then again I crouched and listened and waited—with my hands at my throat.

"Perfect silence and stillness!

"And, do you know, my friends, it positively never occurred to me to cry out for help! . . . I suppose my faculties were all so engrossed in this strange struggle that no corner of my brain was free to think, '*One shout and Jean Boule will burst in your door, sword-bayonet in hand.*'" . . .

"More likely you wanted to see it out all by your little self, *mon ancien*," smiled Colonel Lebrun.

"But no, I assure you. I never thought to shout for help. . . . And then, as I put a hand to the floor, I touched the matches that had fallen with the table. And I thanked *le bon Dieu*. . . . With trembling fingers I struck a light—wondering what would be revealed to my staring eyes, and whether the light would be the signal for my death-blow. Should I get it in the back—or across the neck? Was it a common Chinese 'pirate'? I hoped so, . . . but they do not have dead hands and intangible bodies. . . .

"The match flared. . . .

"The room was empty. . . .

"Absolutely empty. And, look you, my friends, the door was still locked on the inside; there was no fireplace and chimney, and not so much as a cat could have escaped by the window without knocking down the articles which stood on the inner ledge of it—some little brass ornaments, a crude vase, and one or two framed photographs or pictures. I went cold all over. What had throttled me? What had stabbed me? Where was the cold Dead Hand which I had grasped? . . .

"I lit the wall-lamp.

"There lay the table, overturned in the struggle. There lay the little lamp which I had carried in from the neighbouring bathroom. Its glass chimney was shattered and oil was running from its brass reservoir. And there, in my right arm, was the great, gaping stab.

"Going to the mirror, I saw at a glance that there were marks of fingers on my throat. . . . *And I knew that nothing bigger than a rat could have left the room!*

"I felt that I had had enough of mystery in solitude, and remembered my orderly. I was weak and faint from the awful struggle, and a little sick from the stab. . . . Also, my friends,

I was frightened. . . . A murderous foe who can throttle and stab, does not lock the door on the inside as he leaves the room, look you, and neither does he climb through a small window in silence without disturbing bric-à-brac upon the sill. . . .

" I unlocked the door, and shouted to my Jean Boule. He replied on the instant, and came running.

" He must have thought me mad when he heard my tale—until I directed his attention to the stab in my arm and the finger-marks on my neck. . . .

" He stared at the débris on the floor, at the undisturbed ornaments on the window-ledge, at the door, and finally at the marks on my person.

" ' Why does not Monsieur le Capitaine bleed ? ' said he suddenly. ' Has he used anything to stop the hæmorrhage so successfully ? ' and he took my arm in his hands.

" Sure enough—no drop of blood had flowed from the deep stab in my forearm.

" ' Why, the arm is dead,' cried Jean Boule, as he felt it. ' What have you been doing to it, mon Capitaine ? . . . Excuse me ' . . . and he placed a thumb on each side of the stab, opened it, and peered. Then he laughed in his

quiet gentlemanly way, and glanced at the smashed lamp.

"'I thought so,' he said. 'Glass. No circulation. The hand dead,' and he laughed again.

"'What do you mean, Légionnaire?' I asked, nettled by his amusement.

"'Why—Monsieur le Capitaine has had a great and terrible fight *with himself*—and won. He went to sleep on his right side with his right arm raised and bent over his neck—and the arm also went to sleep as the circulation ceased, owing to the position—and Monsieur le Capitaine got hold of his throat and choked himself. Then he had nightmare, *cauchemar*, turned on his back, and woke up choking, and it was some time before he could budge the cold, stiff arm. . . . When he did, he flung it straight on to the lamp, broke the thing, and cut himself to the bone.' . . .

"And so it was! . . .

"But I contend that *I have been throttled by a Dead Hand*, d'Amienville." . . .

Lieutenant d'Amienville made a strange noise in his throat and then rose and escaped from the circle of mocking eyes.

It was felt that Captain d'Armentières had not only moved an immovable arm, but had, as the droll English say, "pulled" an unpullable leg.

V

THE GIFT

IT was Guest Night at the Spahis' mess.

"What *I* complain of is the utter absence of gratitude among natives," said "Général" Archambaud Thibaud d'Amienville of the Chasseurs d'Afrique of the XIXth Army Corps of La République Française. "It is highly significant that there is no word for 'Thank you' in the vernacular, isn't it? . . . If you do a native a good turn, he either wonders what you want of him, or else casts about in his mind for the reason why you want to propitiate him. If you had cause to punish one of your Spahis and did not do it, he would think you were afraid to. Kindness is in their eyes pure weakness. If you forego vengeance, it *must* be because you think the offender may avenge that vengeance. No, gratitude doesn't flourish under a tropical sun." . . . Lieutenant d'Amienville was very young and therefore very cynical.

"Is it a plant of very hardy growth under a temperate one?" inquired Captain Gautier d'Armentières of the First Battalion of the Legion. "I seem to have heard complaints, and I fancy that poets from the days of Homer to those of this morning have had something to say about it."

"Quite so," agreed Médecin-Major Parme; "but pass me the matches, and I will promise a brief pang of gratitude. . . . Quite so. . . . If a fellow does you a really good turn, he is strongly inclined to like you for evermore, and you are equally strongly disposed to regard him as a nuisance, and his mouldy face as a reminder of the time when you had to *faire la lessive*[1] or were in some fearful scrape. . . . I could name a certain absinthe-sodden old Colonel who absolutely loathes me for having saved him, body and soul, some years ago, when he had been betting (and, of course, losing, as all people who bet do) and had then gone to Monte Carlo to put everything right at the gaming-tables! What made it worse was the fact that the departed francs were rather the property of Madame la République than of the Colonel. And Madame prefers to do her own gambling. His position, one Sunday night,

[1] Sell up everything.

was that Monday morning must find him with gold in his pocket or lead in his brain. I found the gold, as I had been at school with him, and had stayed with his people a lot, . . . but I am sure he merely remembers a very shady passage in his career every time he sees me, and loathes me in consequence. He paid the debt off long ago, too."

"I believe you are right," agreed Colonel Lebrun. "One uses the expression '*debt* of gratitude,' and nobody really likes being in debt. . . . The gratitude is rarely paid though. I suppose it is because the creditor of gratitude occupies the higher ground, and one resents being on the lower."

"I certainly once lost a friend by doing him a kindness," put in Adjudant-Major Berthon of the Legion, who was also dining at the Spahis' mess. "This was a loan case, too, and a slight coolness ending in a sharp frost followed immediately upon it. . . . And it wasn't my fault the coolness arose, I am sure."

"Of course the benefactor always likes the beneficiary better than the beneficiary likes the benefactor," said the cynical "Général" d'Amienville, "and the kind action always dwells longer in the mind of the doer than in that of the receiver. Far longer. Always."

"Not always," observed Captain d'Armentières. "Only yesterday . . ."

"*Always*," contradicted d'Amienville.

"I was about to say," continued d'Armentières, "that, only yesterday, I reminded a man of a good turn he did me years ago, and he had clean forgotten it. . . . And it was a deed I could not forget if I lived to be a hundred years old."

"I simply don't believe a man could give you half of his kingdom, or save your valuable life or honour, and forget all about it," replied the "Général."

"I did not say he gave me a half of his kingdom or saved my valuable life or honour," was the quiet answer. "I said he did me a good turn and had absolutely forgotten the incident though I have not, and never shall. I feel the deepest gratitude towards him and always will. I should be very glad of an opportunity of proving the fact." . . .

"A very noble sentiment," sneered the young gentleman.

"No," said d'Armentières patiently. "I am not concerned to exhibit my high morality, fine nature, and noble sentiments, but am stating an example in opposition to your theory; a fact of memory—the respective memories

of benefactor and beneficiary. He had forgotten doing the kindness, while I had remembered receiving it."

"What was the nature of the action, if one might inquire?" put in Médecin-Major Parme.

"Yes, what did he do, *mon salop*?" added Colonel Lebrun. "Surrender the beauteous damsel whom you both loved, with the hiccuping cry, 'Take her. She is thine,' and thenceforth hide a breaking heart beneath a writhing brow or a wrinkling tunic or something?"

"Did he leap into the raging flood, or only place his huge fortune at your disposal? What was the noble deed?" asked Adjudant-Major Berthon.

"It was a gift," replied d'Armentières, smiling. "A free, unsolicited, unexpected, magnificent gift."

"And he had *forgotten* it?" asked d'Amienville, with cold incredulity.

"Absolutely. But I never shall," said d'Armentières.

"And pray, what was this magnificent gift?" sneered d'Amienville. "A priceless horse, a mistress, an estate, a connoisseur's collection, an invaluable secret, your freedom—or what? What wonderful thing did he present to you and forget?"

"A sausage," was the grave answer.

The Spahis roared with laughter at their unpopular brother-officer. He was their guest, but they could not forbear to laugh. A very little goes a long way in the matter of wit in a bored mess, exiled from Home and the larger interests of life.

The "Général" coloured hotly, and remarked that some people were doubtless devilish funny —in season and out of season.

"I assure you it is my misfortune and not my fault if I am funny," was the grave statement of the Legionary. "I have been the recipient of other kindnesses, but not one of them has made such a mark on the tablets of my memory as that sausage."

"They do make marks, I know," observed Médecin-Major Parme. "My wife threw one at me once, just as I was going out to call on the Commander-in-Chief-in-Algeria. He noticed the mark before I did."

"Tell us the touching tale," put in Colonel Lebrun. "Were you on a raft in mid-ocean with one sausage between you and death, and did he say, 'Thy belly is greater than mine,' or 'Your bird,' or something?"

"Surely he'd remember that," observed the sapient d'Amienville.

"No. 'Twas thus," said d'Armentières. "You Spahis don't, for your sins, get sent to Indo-China. We do. And it can be more truly damnable along the Red River than in any desert station in the Sahara. You *have* got the sun, though you grumble at it, and too much heat is always better and less depressing than too little, to my way of thinking. What did Dante know of Hell when he had never been in a place consisting wholly of muddy water and watery mud—with nothing else for hundreds of square miles—except fever, starvation, dysentery, and the acutest craving for suicide? Yes. A low black sky of wet cotton wool, a vast river of black, muddy water, and its banks vast expanses of black watery mud. Nothing else to see—but much to feel. I was a young soldier then—a private of the Legion in my first year." . . .

Captain d'Armentières paused. No one moved or spoke. It was not easy to "get him going"—but it was worth a lot of trouble, for d'Armentières was a man of very great experience, very great courage, and very great ability. Soldier, philosopher, reformer, hero, thinker, and something of a saint.

"Yes—you can go for weeks along the Red River of Tonkin, in an old stinking sampan,

drenched, chilled to the bone, shivering, until you envy the Annamese boatmen in their straw hut in the stern—and see nothing but clouds, water, and mud, save when the unceasing rain is too heavy for you to see anything at all. If God is very good, you *may* perhaps see a castor-oil plant sailing along in the water to tell that there are other human beings somewhere in the terrible world of mud, water, fog, clouds, and rain—Annamese peasants who have sown castor-oil plants in the mud, apparently for the pleasure of seeing that accursed river change its course in order to engulf them.

"I remember wondering why I, why any single one of my Company, consented to live another day. . . . You Spahis and Chasseurs, Zouaves and Tirailleurs Algériens, Turcos and others of the XIXth Army Corps talk of your desert hardships—thirst, *cafard*, Arabs, heat, *ennui*. . . . Pah! I have tried both, and I'd serve a year in the Sahara rather than a week in the Annam jungles in the rains. I remember asking the man to whom I have been referring, my benefactor, an Englishman calling himself John Bull, or Jean Boule, why *he*, for example, went on living.

"'I don't know,' he replied. 'Partly hope of better things, I suppose. Partly a feeling

that suicide is cowardice, and partly the strongest instinct of the human mind—that of self-preservation.'

"And yet, he was obviously a very unhappy man—as any refined person of breeding and education must be, in the ranks of the Legion. I pondered this until, night falling, the boatmen steered for the shore and anchored our junk. The happy souls then shut themselves in their straw hut and caroused on *shum-shum*, the poor man's absinthe in China—an awful rice-spirit—while we huddled, foodless, sodden, and frozen in that ceaseless rain, fog, and bitter wind. . . . Who would not drink himself insensible and unconscious when there was nothing of which to be sensible and conscious but misery of the acutest? . . . It always interests me to hear the comfortably-placed rail against the drunkenness of the poor and wretched. . . . What would not the smuggest bourgeois Bonpère not have given, had he been with us that night, to drown his shuddering soul in the vilest form of alcohol, and escape that bitter fog, fever, hunger, sickness, and awful ache; the mosquitoes, stench, pain, and homeless, lonely misery. . . . When the 'Black Flags' came, with the full moon, I was glad. I would have consented to fall into

their hands alive rather than not die—and they could have taught the Holy Inquisition a whole language and literature of torture of which the Inquisition only knew the alphabet. . . . Yes. I knew I had malarial fever, and I feared I had yellow fever. I knew I had dysentery, and I feared I had cholera. I knew I had an appalling cold and cough, and I feared I had consumption. I can now smile at myself as I was then—but I can also make allowances, for I was a starving, fever-wrecked child of seventeen—nearly dead with dysentery. . . . The bullets of the Black Flags were striking all around us, and it was a case of attacking them for our own safety. They were so close and had the range so well that I suspected our boatmen. I remember old Ivan Plevinski suddenly grunted hideously, heaved himself to his feet, removed his *képi*, and bowed toward the bank. '*Merci, messieurs,*' he gasped, '*Milles remerciments. Je vous remercie. Slava Bogu,*[1]' and died. I envied old Ivan Plevinski, and, judging by his way of life, decided that it would not be from cold that he would suffer in the Hereafter. . . .

"Meanwhile, John Bull, by right of his superior ability, experience, personality, and

[1] Glory to God.

force, had taken command, and the sampan was being poled and hauled ashore. I tried to take a hand at heaving-in the anchor-rope, but fell on it from sheer weakness and was kicked clear of it. As the junk grounded in the mud, the Legionaries sprang over the side, led by John Bull, and struggled through the mud toward the swamp-jungle whence the bullets came. I staggered as far as I could, and then fell and began slowly to sink in the black clayey mud. No—I was not afraid, only very glad to die. And half delirious, watched the fight in the moonlight. I remember being bitterly disappointed that I could not distinguish the features of a man who, on his half-engulfed arms and knees, was vomiting blood just in front of me. I did so want to know who had 'got it,' for he also would accompany me and Ivan Plevinski to the Judgment Seat. I wondered what St. Peter would say if the fellow vomited blood on the doorstep of the Gates of Heaven. Then I became unconscious, delirious. . . . The junk following ours —in which was Lieutenant Egrier, as he then was—came ashore, took the 'pirates' in flank, and drove them off. . . .

"All this leading up to the Sausage of Contention" (with a little bow and smile in the

direction of Lieutenant d'Amienville, fingering his wine-glass and endeavouring to maintain a cynical smile). . . . "You know Egrier's bluff, jolly way. 'What would you like, Jean Boule—recommendation for the *Croix de Guerre* or one of my tinned sausages,' he cried, as he approached Jean, who was pulling me out of the mud. I had broken into a perspiration, and was my own man again by then, and desperately anxious to live. (What was wrong with a world that held 'recommendations,' the *Croix de Guerre*, the *Médaille Militaire*, promotion, a career of glory fighting for La Belle France?)

"'A sausage, mon Lieutenant,' replied Jean Boule, laying me on a bed he had made of mangrove twigs, straw from the boat, and his *capote*.

"'Wise philosopher,' laughed Egrier. 'You shall have two—one for distinguished conduct in the field and one for wisdom.'

"He was as good as his word. Before our sampans resumed their way to Phu-lang-Thuong, he gave Jean two sausages from the tin he opened. As I live, that gaunt, starving man cooked them both, gave one to me, and made the rest of our boat-load cast lots for the other.

"I met him recently. He is still *Soldat deuxième classe*, for he has consistently refused promotion. When I shook him by the hand, he remembered me, but he had absolutely and completely forgotten the episode of the sausage.

"I have not—and I regard his gift to me that day on the Red River in Tonkin as one of the noblest ever given. . . . He is my orderly now. . . . Have you ever starved, d'Amienville? . . . No?" . . .

VI

THE DESERTER

AS she stood on the deck beside her lover-husband and gazed upon the thrillingly beautiful panorama of Marseilles, there was assuredly no happier woman in the world. As he looked at the rapt face and wide-opened glorious eyes of the lovely girl beside him there can scarcely have been a man as happy.

They had been married in England a week earlier, were on their way to his vast house and vaster estate in Australia, and had come round by sea, instead of suffering the miseries of the " special " across France (which saves a week to leave-expired returning Anglo-Indians).

Happy ! Her happiness was almost a pain. As a child she had childishly adored him ; and now he had returned from his wanderings, after a decade of varied, strenuous life—to adore her. Life was too impossibly, hopelessly wonderful and beautiful. . . . He, who had been everywhere, done everything, been every-

thing—soldier, sailor, rancher, planter, prospector, hunter, explorer—had come Home for a visit, and laid his heart at the feet of a country mouse. Happy! His happiness frightened him. After more than ten years of the roughest of roughing it, he had "made good" (exceeding good), and on top of good fortune incredible, had, to his wondering bewilderment, won the love of the sweetest, noblest, fairest, and most utterly lovable and desirable woman in the world. She whom he had left a child had grown into his absolute ideal of Woman, and had been by some miracle reserved for him.

And which would now know the greater joy in their travels—he in showing her the fair places of the earth and telling her of personal experiences therein, or she in being shown them by this adored hero who had come to make her life a blessed dream of joy? Not that the fair places of the earth were necessary to their happiness. They could have spent a happy day in London on a wet Sunday, or at the end of Southend pier on a Bank Holiday, or in a prison-cell for that matter—for the mind of each to the other a kingdom was.

"Would you like to go ashore? . . . 'Madame, will you walk and talk with me,' in the *Cannebière*?" he asked.

"Of *course*, we must go ashore, Beloved Snail," was the reply. "I have no idea what the *Cannebière is*—but," and she hugged his arm and whispered, "you can always 'give me the keys of Heaven,' and walk and talk with me There." (He was "Beloved Snail" when he was a Bad Man and late for meals; "Bill" when he was virtuous or forgiven.)

The ship being tied up, and a notice having guaranteed that she would on no account untie before midnight, this foolish couple, who utterly loved each other, walked down the gangway, passed the old lady who sells balloons and the old gentleman who sells deck-chairs, the young lady who sells glorious violets and the young gentleman who sells un-glorious "field"-glasses; through the echoing customs-shed and out to where, beside a railway-line, specimens of the genus *cocher* lie in wait for those who would drive to the boulevards and in hope for those who know not that four francs is ample fare.

To the sights of Marseilles he took her, enjoying her enjoyment as he had enjoyed few things in his life, and then in the *Cannebière* dismissed the fiacre.

"In Rome you must roam like the Romans," he observed. "In Marseilles you must sit on

little chairs in front of a café and see the World and his Wife (or Belle Amie) go by."

"Fancy sitting outside a public-house in Regent Street or the Strand and watching Londoners go by!" said the girl. "Isn't it extraordinary what a difference in habits and customs one finds by travelling a few miles? Think of English officers sitting, in uniform, on the pavement, like those are, and drinking in public," . . . and she pointed to a group of French officers so engaged. "Do let's go and sit near them," she added. "I have never seen soldiers dressed in pale blue and silver, and all the colours of the rainbow. . . . Aren't they pretty—dears!" . . .

"Their uniforms look quaint to the insular eye, madam, I admit," he replied, as he led the way to an unoccupied table near the brilliant group, "but they are not toy soldiers by any means. They all belong to regiments of the African Army Corps, the Nineteenth, and there isn't a finer one on earth."

"Darling, you know *everything*," smiled his wife. "Fancy knowing a thing like that now! I wonder how many other Englishmen know anything about this African Army and that it is the Ninety-Ninth. Now *how* do you know?"

It was his turn to smile, and he did so somewhat wryly.

"What will you have?" he asked, as an aproned *garçon* hovered around. "Coffee or *sirop* or—how would you like to be devil-of-a-fellow and taste a sip of absinthe? . . . You'll hate it."

"No, thank you, Bill-man. Is the syrup golden-syrup or syrup-of-squills or what? No, I'll have some coffee and see if it is."

"Is what?"

"Coffee." . . .

Meanwhile an elderly, grizzled officer, with a somewhat brutal face, was staring hard and rudely at the unconscious couple. He wore a dark blue tunic with red-tabbed and gold-braided collar and cuffs, scarlet overalls, and a blue and red *képi*. So prolonged was his unshifting gaze, so fierce his frown, and so obvious his interest, that his companions noticed the fact.

"Is the old hog smitten with *la belle Anglaise*, I wonder, or what?" murmured a handsome youth in the beautiful pale blue uniform of the Chasseurs d'Afrique to an even more gorgeous officer of Spahis.

"I have never known Legros take the faintest interest in women," replied the other.

" There will be a beastly *fracas* if the husband glances this way. He'll promise Legros to *ponch ees 'ead* if he thinks he's being rude—as he is."

Certainly the elderly and truculent-looking officer *was* being rude, for not only was he staring with a hard, concentrated glare, but he was leaning as far forward as he could, the better to do it. Anyone—man, woman, or child—being conscious of this deliberate, searching gaze, must resent it. It was that of a gendarme, examining the face of a criminal and endeavouring to " place " him and recollect the details of his last encounter with him, or of a *juge d'instruction* examining a criminal in that manner which does not find favour in England.

" It is as good as sitting in the stalls of a theatre, sitting here and seeing all these varied types go by, isn't it, Bill ? " observed the girl. " Oh, *do* look at *that*—that boy in brown velvet and a forked beard ! "

" We are sitting in the Stalls of the Theatre of Life, my child," was the sententious reply, but in reality they were sitting nearer to the Pit.

The brutal-looking officer scratched the back of his neck slowly up and down with the fore-

finger of his left hand, a sure sign that he was wrestling with an elusive reminiscence. For a moment he took his eyes from the face of the Englishman and looked sideways at the pavement, cudgelling his brains, ransacking the cells of his memory. With a muttered oath at failure to recapture some piece of long-stored information, he put his hand into the inside pocket of his tunic and produced a tiny flat case. From this he took a pair of pince-nez and adjusted them upon the bridge of his broad, short nose. From the slowness and clumsiness of his movements it was evident that he had only just taken to glasses, or else wore them very seldom.

The latter was the case, as Lieutenant Legros considered spectacles of any kind a most unmilitary and *pékinesque* adjunct to uniform.

A quiet, gentlemanly-looking officer, a Captain, wearing a similar uniform to that of Legros, observed the action.

"Evidently something interests our friend beyond ordinary," he remarked, and followed the look that the elderly Lieutenant again fixed upon the Englishman, whom the Captain now noticed for the first time.

Sitting with his back to the road, and almost facing Legros, he got a better view of the Englishman's features than did that deeply inter-

ested officer, who, without reply, continued his searching scrutiny. Evidently a person of great powers of concentration. As his glance fell upon the young couple, the Captain started slightly and then looked away.

"Who's for a stroll?" he remarked, half rising. But his suggestion was not adopted, for glasses were charged, cigarettes alight, the shade of the café and awning very agreeable, and the sunshine hot without.

"Have an *apéritif* first, *mon ami*, and be restful," said a Zouave officer, and tinkled the little table-bell loudly.

The Englishman half-consciously turned toward the sound, and looked away again without noticing the baleful, steady glare fixed upon him through the glasses of the Lieutenant.

"*Dame!*" grunted that officer, and smote his brow in an agony of exasperation at the failure of his memory. . . . Curse it! Was he getting old? He had the fellow's name and the circumstances of his case on the tip of his tongue, so to speak—at the tips of his fingers, as it were—and he could not say the word he was bursting to say; could not lay his twitching mental fingers on the details. . . . He *knew*. . . . He was right. . . . He would have it in a minute. . . .

A paper-boy passed the long front of the café and shouted some wholly unintelligible word as he gazed over the serried ranks of chairs and loungers.

"What does he say, Bill?" asked the girl. "It sounds like *Barin*. How ill the poor lad looks! Fancy having to sell papers for a living when you are starving and horribly ill, as he obviously is," and as her hand stole to her charitable purse, she gratefully thought of the utter security, peace, comfort, and health of *her* life—now that Bill had linked it to his. . . . What was the phrase? . . . Yes—she had "hitched her wagon to a star"; her poor little homely wagon to the glorious and brilliant star of her Bill's career. . . . The inquisitorial Lieutenant used the paper-boy for the purposes of his tactics. Rising, he made his way between the chairs and the groups of *apéritif*-drinking citizens, to where the boy stood, bought a paper, and returned by a route which brought him full face-to-face with the Englishman. Recognition was instantaneous and mutual. The brutal countenance of the elderly Lieutenant was not improved by a sardonic smile and look of mean and petty triumph as he thrust an outstretched index-finger in the Englishman's face and harshly grunted.

"Henri Rrrobinson!" and then laughed a sneering, hideous cackle.

Staring in utter bewilderment from the French officer to her husband, the girl saw with horror that his jaw had dropped, his mouth and eyes were gaping wide, and he had gone as white as a sheet.

"Sergeant Legros!" he whispered.

"Lieutenant Legros," grunted the other.

What had happened? What in the name of the Merciful Father was this? Was she dreaming? Her husband looked deathly. He seemed paralysed with fright.

The Lieutenant half turned, and shouted to a couple of sombre and mysterious-looking gens d'armes who had been standing for some time on the little "island" under the big lamp-post in the middle of the road. As they approached, the Englishman rose to his feet.

"Listen, darling!" he hissed. "Get out of this quick—to the ship. Take a *fiacre* and say '*P. and O. bateau.*' I'll join you all right. They have . . ."

The Lieutenant put a heavy hand on his shoulder and swung him round.

"Arrest this man," said he to the gens d'armes, "and take him to Fort St. Jean. He is a deserter, one Henri Rrrobinson, from the

First Battalion of the Foreign Legion. Deserted from Sidi-bel-Abbès eight years ago. But *I* knew the dog. Aha!"

The group of officers whom Legros had just left, joined the gathering crowd.

"Poor devil!" said Captain d'Armentières. He too had recognized the *soi-disant* Henry Robinson. . . . "Poor girl!" he added. "Poor little soul!" She looked like *une nouvelle mariée* too. Of course Legros had only done his duty—curse him. Curse him a thousand times for a blackguardly, brutal ruffian. The girl was going to faint. . . . Her wedding-ring looked brand-new. "If this is his wedding-night, he'll spend it in the *salle de police* of Fort St. Jean," he reflected. "If he is on his honeymoon, he'll spend it in the *cellules* until the General Court-Martial at Oran gives him a few years *rabiau* with the Zephyrs. If he survives that, which is improbable, he will finish his five years of Legion service. No—she won't see much of him during the next decade. . . . Poor little soul!"

The gens d'armes duly arrested the deserter. He caught the eye of the Captain.

"Captain d'Armentières," said he, "you are a French gentleman. This lady is my wife. We have been married a week. I beg of you

to see her safe on board the P. and O. steamer *Maloja*, which we have just left, for an hour's visit here."

"I will do so," said d'Armentières.

A fat and kindly Frenchman, who understood English, translated for the benefit of the crowd. It became intensely sympathetic—at least with the girl. The French, for some reason, imagine their Foreign Legion to be composed of Germans, and the French do not love Germans. . . . And then, having commended his wife to d'Armentières (whom he had liked and admired in the past when he had played the fool's prank of joining the Legion "for a lark"), he thought rapidly and clearly. . . .

If they once got him inside Fort St. Jean (the clearing-house for drafts and details going to, and coming from, Algeria—recruits, convalescents, leave-expired, all sorts; Legionaries, Zouaves, Turcos, Spahis, Tirailleurs) he was done. In a short time he would be a convict, in military-convict dress, enduring the living-death of existence in the Zephyrs, the terrible Disciplinary Battalion, compared with whose lot that of the British long-sentence convict at Dartmoor, Portland, or Wormwood Scrubbs is a bed of roses in the lap of luxury.

After that—back to the Legion *if* he were alive to finish his five years, of which there were four unexpired. And his wife—stranded, without money, in Marseilles, unless d'Armentières got her to the ship. And what would she do then—at the end of the voyage? . . . God help them! . . . A few minutes ago—happiness unspeakable, safety, security, peace, all life before them. Now—in a few minutes he would be in gaol and his adored, adoring wife a deserted, friendless stranger in a strange land. . . . Would they *allow* d'Armentières to take her to the ship? Would they want her to give evidence—put her in some kind of prison until the Court-Martial sat? Suppose d'Armentières had not been there, and she had been left to the tender mercies of Legros—or utterly deserted, fainting on a café chair. . . .

Well, things couldn't be much worse (or *could* they) if he "resisted the police," assaulted the duly-appointed officers of the law in the execution of their duty, and made a break for liberty. No, things couldn't be worse. Neither he nor she would survive the next ten years. And there was a *chance*, or the ghost of a shadow of a chance. The deck of the *Maloja* was English soil, and they could not lay a finger on him there. If only she were safe on board, he'd

make the attempt. There *was* a chance—and he had always taken the sporting chance, all his life. . . . And this vile cur of a Legros! He had many a score to pay off to Sergeant Legros—the prize bully of the XIXth Army Corps. Now *this*! If he could only have his hands at the throat of Legros. As these thoughts flashed through his brain, "May I say farewell to my wife and see her into a *fiacre* with you, Captain d'Armentières?" he asked. He appeared to be as cool as he was pale. The Captain was the senior officer present.

"Yes," he said. "I will drive her as quickly as possible to the ship," and willing hands helped the fainting girl into the *fiacre*. . . . Was she dying? As she lost her hold and sank into the bottomless depths of unconsciousness she was finally aware that her husband winked at her violently. That wink in a face which was a pallid, tragic mask, was the most dreadful and heartrending thing she had ever seen. Anyhow, it meant some kind of reassurance which he could not put into words without disclosing some plan to his captors. She fainted completely, in the act of wondering whether this was merely that he was putting a good face on it and pretending for her benefit, or whether he really had a plan. Anyhow she was to go

to the ship—and, in any case, she was dying of a broken heart. . . .

As he watched his wife driven rapidly away, the Englishman formulated his plans.

He would delay as long as he could in order that his wife might be on board the ship before he reached it, if ever he did.

He would go quietly and willingly—but as slowly as possible—while the road to Fort St. Jean was the road to the ship. He would then break away from his pursuers and run for it. He would show them what an old Oxford miler and International Rugger forward could do in the way of running and dodging, and, perchance, what sort of a fight an amateur champion heavy-weight could put up.

But strategy first, strength and skill afterwards, for he was playing a terrible game, with his wife's happiness at stake, not to mention his own liberty. With a groan, he artistically smote his knees together and sank to the ground. That would gain a little time anyhow, and they'd hardly carry him to Fort St. Jean, nor waste a cab-fare on the carcase of a Legionary.

He wasn't quite certain as to the nearest way from the Cannebière to Fort St. Jean, but

he remembered that it was down by the water-front. Yes, he could again see its quaint old tower, like a lighthouse, and its drawbridged moat, as he closed his eyes. Part of the way to it would be the way to the P. and O. wharf at Mole C, or whatever it was, anyhow. Would they take him by tram? That might complicate matters. If they were going to do that, should he make his break for liberty at once, or on the journey, or at the end of it? It would be comparatively easy to make a dash before or after the tram-ride, but they'd surely never let him escape them from a crowded tram. Would they handcuff him? If so, that would settle it. He'd fight and run the moment handcuffs were produced. You can't run in handcuffs, although you think you can. Would they shoot? It would be Hell to be winged in sight of the ship. Was the P. and O. wharf British soil, as well as the ship?

Almost certainly not.

Lieutenant Legros kicked him in the ribs.

"Get up, *tricheur*," he shouted. He was in his element, and fairly gloated over his victim, who only groaned and collapsed the more.

To those of the crowd who realized that he was an Englishman, he was an object of pity; to those who concluded that, being a Legionary,

he was a German, he was merely an object of interest.

The officers who had been sitting with Legros departed in some disgust, and the crowd changed, eddied, and thinned. . . . Only a sick man being attended to by a couple of gens d'armes!

These latter grew a little impatient. The sooner they could dispose of this fine fellow the better, but they certainly weren't going to march to Fort St. Jean at the request of a Lieutenant of Legionaries. Let the army do it own dirty work. They'd run him in all right to the nearest lock-up, and he could be handed over to the military authorities, to be dealt with, whenever they liked to fetch him. To the devil with all Légionnaires, be they deserters or Lieutenants! "He had better be taken to the police-station on a stretcher, mon Lieutenant," suggested one of them. "It would appear that he has fainted."

"Stretcher!" roared Legros, and spat. "Pah! That is not how we deal with swine of Légionnaires who sham sick. Stretcher! Drag him face downward by one toe at the tail of a dust-cart more likely!"

Oho! Police-station, was it? Not Fort St. Jean immediately. And where might the nearest police-station be, wondered the pros-

trate Englishman. He must not let them get him there. The boat would sail at midnight, whether he were on board or not—and once the cell door closed on him it would not open till the morning.

Perhaps he had better take his leave at once. Unless they went in the direction of the docks for some part of the way it would be a cruelly punishing run. . . . Just as bad for them though, and he'd back himself against any of these beefy old birds for a four-mile race. . . . His wife must be half-way there by now—more, if d'Armentières urged the *cocher*, as he would.

Was it likely that d'Armentières would collect a guard of gens d'armes, dock police, soldiers, or customs officials at the wharf gate or the ship's gangway, and lie in wait to see if he tried to get on board? No—d'Armentières was not that sort.

(He was not, and when, later, Lieutenant Legros was reduced to the rank of sergeant for what was practically the brutal murder of a Legionary, Captain d'Armentières thought of this incident and rejoiced.)

And if he did—let them stop him if they could. He'd break through the scrum of them all right. Lay some of them out too.

What was Legros saying? Urging the gens

d'armes to boot him up and lug him off by the scruff of his neck, eh?

He groaned again, sat up with difficulty, shakily and painfully rose to his feet, then smote Legros a smashing blow between the eyes, butted the gendarme who stood on his right, and with a dodge, a jump, and a wriggle was away and running like a hare.

To the end of his life he never forgot that race for life, and for more than life. Scores of times he lived through it again in terrible nightmares and suffered a thousand times more than he did on the actual run itself. For then he was quite cool, steady, and unafraid. He imagined himself to be running with the ball at Blackheath or Richmond, threading his way through the hostile fifteen, dodging, leaping, handing-off. But there were one or two differences. In Rugger you may not drive your clenched fist with all your might into the face of any man who springs at you. . . . Nor do you run for miles over cobbles. . . .

It was really surprisingly easy. Once he had got clear and put a few yards between himself and the uninjured gendarme, it was even betting that he'd win—provided his wind held and he didn't get the stitch, and that he did not slip and fall on the cursed stones. For

the folk behind he cared nothing, and with such in front as grasped the situation in time to do something, he could deal. Some he dodged, some he handed-off as at Rugger, and some he hit. These last were slower to rise than those he handed-off, or caused to fall by dodging them as they sprang at him.

When he turned a sharp corner he was so well ahead of the original pursuers that he was merely a man running, and that is not in itself an indictable offence. Certainly people stopped and stared at the sight of an obvious foreigner running at top speed, but he might have a boat to catch, he might be pursuing a train of thought or his lost youth and innocence. *Que voulez-vous?* Besides, he might be English, and therefore mad.

And then the blue-faced, panting gendarme would round the corner at the head of such *gamins*, loafers, police agents, and other citizens as saw fit to run on a hot afternoon. Whereupon people in this sector of street would look after the runaway and some run after him as well. So the pursuing crowd continually changed, as some left it and others joined it, until there remained of the old original firm scarcely any but the distressed and labouring gendarme—who, at last, himself gave up, reeled

to the wall, and whooping and gasping for breath, prepared to meet his Maker.

Before the poor man had decided that this event was not yet, the Englishman had dashed round another corner and actually leapt on to an electric tram in full flight toward the *quais*!

Ciel! How mad were these English! Fancy a man running like that now, just to catch a tram. No, he would *not* go inside; he preferred to stand on the platform, and stand there he would.

He did, and anon, the tram having stopped at his polite request to the conductor, he strolled on to the P. and O. wharf and marched up the gangway of the good ship *Maloja*.

A steward informed him that his wife were ill, 'aving been brought aboard by a French gent and took to 'er cabing. She were still lying down. . . .

She was, at that moment, very ill indeed, mentally and physically.

But not for long, when his arms had assured her that they were not those of a vision and a ghost. . . .

If you ever travel Home with them, you'll find they don't go ashore at Marseilles. No, they don't like the place—prefer to stay on board, even through the coaling.

VII

FIVE MINUTES

LE LÉGIONNAIRE JACQUES BONHOMME (as he called himself) was dying, and Sergeant Baudré, in charge of the convoy of wounded, proceeding from the nasty, messy fighting at Hu-Thuong to the base hospital at Phulang-Thuong, kindly permitted a brief halt that he might die in peace.

The good Sergeant Baudré could not accord more than an hour to the Legionary for his dying arrangements, because he had been instructed by his captain to get back as quickly as possible, and Phulang-Thuong lies only twenty-four miles south of Hu-Thuong.

Sergeant Baudré had other reasons also. For one, he was apprehensive of attack by some wandering band of De Nam's "pirates," and the outlaw brigands who served Monsieur De Nam, mandarin of the deposed Emperor of Annam, Ham-Nghi, were men whose courage and skill in fighting were only excelled by their

ingenuity and pitilessness in torturing such of their enemies as fell into their hands. No, Sergeant Baudré had seen the remains of some of the prisoners of these "Black Flags," and he shuddered yet whenever he thought of them.

And what could he do, strung out over a mile, with a weak escort of Tirailleurs Tonkinois to provide his point, cover-point, and main body with the wounded, and an *escouade* of Legionaries for his rearguard? The sooner he got to Phulang-Thuong, the better. Returning, unhampered by the wounded, he could take care of himself, and any band of "Black Flags" who chose to attack him could do so. They should have a taste of the fighting qualities of Sergeant Baudré and his Legionaries. As it was—Sergeant Baudré shrugged his shoulders and bade Legionary Jacques Bonhomme die and be done with it.

"I thank you, Sergeant," murmured the dying man. "May I speak with le Légionnaire Jean Boule, if he is with the squad?"

The Sergeant grunted. He ran his eye along the halted column. Would those Tirailleurs Tonkinois stand, if there were a sudden rush of howling devils from the dense jungle on either side of the track? And why should

they be allowed to take their women about with them everywhere, so that these should carry their kit and accoutrements for them? Nobody carried Sergeant Baudré's hundredweight of kit when he marched. Why should these Annamese be pampered thus? Should he send the squad of Legionaries to the head of the column when they advanced again? It would be just his luck if the column was attacked in front while the Legionaries were in the rear, or *vice versâ*.

Sergeant Baudré strolled toward the rear. He would get the opinion of "Jean Boule" in the course of a little apparently aimless conversation. He had been an officer before he joined the Legion, and these English knew all there is to know about guerilla fighting. . . .

From his remarks and replies it was clear to the good Sergeant that the Englishman considered that any attack would certainly come from the rear.

"Without doubt," agreed Sergeant Baudré. "That is why I keep the *escouade* as rear-guard."

"By the way," he added, "Légionnaire Bonhomme wishes to say '*Au 'voir*' to you. He is off in a few minutes. Go and tell him to hurry up. We march again as soon as we

have fed. He is the first stretcher in front of the Tirailleurs' women."

Légionnaire John Bull hurried to the spot. He knew that poor Jacques Bonhomme's number was up. It was a marvel how he had hung on, horribly wounded as he was—shot, speared, and staked, all at once, and all in the abdomen. He had been friendly with Jacques—an educated man and once a gentleman.

A glance showed him that he was too late. The man was delirious and semi-conscious. If he had any message or commission, it would never be put into words now.

The Englishman sat on the ground beside the stretcher and took the hand of the poor wretch. Possibly some sense of sympathy, company, friendship, or support might penetrate to, and comfort, the stricken soul.

After a while the over-bright eyes turned toward him.

"Any message, Jacques, *mon ami*?" he whispered, stroking the hand he held.

But Jacques Bonhomme talked on in the monotonous way of the fever-smitten, though with a strange consecutiveness. John Bull listened carefully, in the hope that some name, rank, office, or address might be mentioned

and give a clue to relatives or the undelivered message or last commission.

. . . " Only five minutes in each year ! Morel tells me there are five hundred and twenty-five thousand and six hundred minutes in each year, and I believe him implicitly, for he is the finest mathematical professor the Sorbonne ever had. I believe him implicitly. He is no Classic, but he has good points and can do wonderful things with figures. Wonderful feats ! He knows all about things like the Metric System, Decimals, and Vulgar Fractions and similar things of which one hears but never encounters. He can not only add up columns of francs and centimes, such as are found in the bills which tradesmen are fond of writing, even when they have received payment, but he can deal with things like pounds, shillings, and pence ; dollars and cents ; yen and sabuks ; or rupees, annas, and pice, not only with marvellous accuracy, but with incredible rapidity. This makes him an invaluable travelling companion for a Classic who knows none of these things—apart from the fact that he can also find out the times of trains and steamers from railway and shipping guides. It is wonderful to see him seize a book, scan it for a moment, and then say unhesitatingly that a

train will leave the Gare de Lyon at a certain hour on a certain day, that it will just catch a ship at Marseilles on the next day, and that this ship will just catch another at Aden, so many days later, and that this one will land you in Japan at a certain hour on a certain day. And yet he is not a bit proud of these things—no prouder than I am of my little metrical translation of the Satires and Odes of Horace into Greek. And he thinks I travel with him for the sake of his delightful company! A man who cannot utter a hackneyed Latin quotation without some horrible false quantity. Poor Morel! . . .

"And this piece of information as to the number of minutes in a year is one of the most useful calculations he ever did on my behalf, except the one he did in answer to my query as to how many waking minutes there are—how many minutes in what one might call an active or waking year. That is to say, counting only the minutes when one is not asleep. He tells me there are three hundred and seventy-two thousand and three hundred waking minutes in the year for a man who averages seven hours sleep a day, or rather night—for he never sleeps in the day. How he knows I cannot tell, but I believe him absolutely, for he is

as truthful as he is clever. So now I know that if I subtract five from this last appalling total I can tell how many minutes of the year I spend in thinking of the other five. After arriving at an aggravating variety of results, I again sought the good Morel's help, and he assures me that, subtracting five from the last total with which he furnished me, I have three hundred and seventy-two thousand and two hundred and ninety-five minutes.

"Thus I can now tell you clearly, that I spend three hundred and seventy-two thousand and two hundred and ninety-five minutes of the year in thinking of the other five—the five I spend with *Her*. . . .

"That is my point—do you understand?

"But although these magnificent figures give me much gratification, they cannot be taken as what Morel calls 'final,' for though during the majority of those minutes I am thinking of the other five consciously, I am only thinking of them subconsciously during the remainder, when I am lecturing, writing Greek hexameters, or reconstructing Greece and Rome for bored students who care for none of these things so long as they pass their absurd examinations—for we have not the spirit of study any more in France, but only

the letter, thanks to those same examinations that prohibit thought, research, reading and culture absolutely. Moreover the figures are also what Morel calls 'vitiated,' by the fact that a vast number of my sleeping moments are also given to dreaming of those five, and dreaming, as any philosopher will tell you, is far better and finer than thinking. Morel stoutly denies this—but that one would expect from so uneducated and uncultured a man. What I want to know is whether you think I might balance the waking moments when I can only think of her subconsciously against the sleeping moments when I am actually dreaming of her, and consider that the total of three hundred and seventy-two thousand and two hundred and ninety-five is approximately correct? The matter is of the first importance to me. I hate figures, as a rule, for they give me a headache, but in this one instance I want them correct. As I am so often told that I must be more scientific, accurate, and exact, I have tried to express myself mathematically and can do no better. To me it seems that I might just as well have said, 'I spend all the year in thinking of five minutes of it'—but I suppose some queer child of the new generation of Frenchmen would

at once point out that I spend nearly a third of my time in sleeping, and much of it in working. . . . My head is in a dreadful whirl and muddle about it though. . . .

"Every year she goes to the tiny Breton village of Poldac for one week. I suppose she feels that she must have one week's rest and communion with her own soul if she is to live. On the first day of every July she goes, and her train stops at Pennebecque for five minutes. As you have guessed, I go to Pennebecque every year for that five minutes. It is the longest stop that the train makes. . . . And the setting of the scene is so wonderful, it is worthy to frame such a picture. I would not see her in the dust and noise and bustle of the Gare de l'Ouest, or at any ugly little wayside station. Yes, I go to Pennebecque to see her for five minutes every year. The only other train that passes through that tiny place does so at night. So I arrive over-night and sit on a seat and wait, almost too happy and exalted to breathe. . . .

"I have sat on that seat, for the last night of June, for seven years. And I have striven not to pray that the Marquis might die. And yet would not he be better dead—the poor, lolling-tongued, squint-eyed, half-witted Mar-

quis? Think of that marvel of beauty, grace, goodness, and wit, the Marquise de Montheureux, making herself the nurse, the attendant, the keeper, of a lunatic!

"Yes, but for that one week in the year she is never out of his sight, night or day. If she but turns her back he weeps and sobs aloud. She tends that great, slobbering, dribbling lout, that mindless, soulless clod—no more sentient nor responsive than a hippopotamus—as the most devoted of young mothers tends and nurses her firstborn. . . .

"For one week in the year she lives her own life, and for five minutes in the year I see her. For six months I do nothing but look forward to that five minutes, and for six months again I do nothing but look back upon it.

"The first time, she did not see me, or did not recognize me as the man whom she had seen at the neighbouring château of the de Grandcourts—where I was tutor to the young Comte.

"The second time I ventured to bow, having debated the matter for a year, and she bowed and smiled, with the remark that only the other day the Comtesse de Grandcourt was speaking of me and my good influence over the headstrong and rather wild boy who had been in my charge.

"The next year she spoke to me and commented on the curious coincidence of my being there again. She is of the real and true *noblesse*, you see, and has the kind, gentle, and unassuming manner of the genuine aristocrat. *Noblesse oblige.* She was as sweetly, graciously kind to the village curé, to her own servants, or to me, as she was to de Grandcourt himself. She was a noble, and her nobility was made patent by her nobleness. It is your bourgeois 'noble' whose nobility has to be advertised by gilt and plush and display and rudeness to 'inferiors.'

"The fourth year she did not remark on the 'coincidence' of my presence at the station. She understood. And she accepted the bunch of roses I took. Oh, the sleepless nights I passed in the agony of that struggle to decide whether to take the roses!

"The year she did not come was rather terrible. I did not know what an eternity could be covered by two years. The bellowing calf of a Marquis was 'ill,' forsooth, and she never left his bedside. . . . Curse him! Had he not even the sense and understanding to see what he was making of her life, and to die like a man?

"*Bon Dieu!* Surely *to die* is easy—it is

living that is so hard. But no—Monsieur le Marquis de Montheureux could not die. He must go on living, even though he could not wash his own face nor feed himself. . . .

"The sixth year she gave me so beautiful and kind and understanding a smile! She knew that I lived but for that five minutes. How I sang through the next twelve months! She knew. She understood. She smiled at me. Why should I not love her? It did neither her nor anyone else any harm, and it made my life—well—glorious, and gave it all the fineness and fulness that it possessed.

"For I simply did everything as though she were watching me, and as though account were to be rendered to her instead of to God. Was this an offence against *Le Bon Dieu*? . . .

"Sin? I dare to think for myself in religious matters. And I say that what is absolutely good must be of God—and if it isn't, I can't help it. And I lived as though she were watching me.

"The seventh year she gave me her hand. Had my heart been other than strong I should have died. . . . For twelve months I pondered the possibility of daring to put my lips to it, should she give me her hand again. When-

ever she encountered de Grandcourt, he used to bow in the ancient grand manner, sweeping the ground with his hat, as though it were a great *mousquetaire* head-dress, and as she swept him a mock curtsey in return he could kiss her hand. Why should not I? No de Grandcourt could honour her more nor love her as much. . . .

"That eighth year, I, poor fool, had determined that, if she again gave me her hand, I would kiss it. What Emperor then could have the pride and glory of the man who had kissed the hand of the Marquise de Montheureux? Would I, Cæsar Maximilien Raoul de Baillieul, then change with any king on earth?

"The day came, and I sat in the usual place, awaiting her, and picturing her. She would wear, this year, a silken dust-cloak of a lavender tint, and her glorious hair would be uncovered. One hand would be bare, the other gloved in a shade of lavender. I felt certain of these details.

"The train came at last, and yet all too soon. When she had come and gone there would be twelve months to live through, before I might see her again.

"I went to the window of the nearest first-class carriage.

"There she sat alone, and, as I approached, the beautiful slow smile, to me the loveliest thing on earth, warmed her glorious face.

"She was arrayed in lavender-coloured silk, her head was bare and so was her hand. She extended it towards me. With heart beating as though I had just run a race, I stepped to the window—*and she was not.* The carriage was empty, and as I clung to the handle, a little faint, her maid, dressed in deep mourning, came to a neighbouring window and looked out. . . .

"Madame la Marquise had died of typhoid which had broken out in Montheureux village. She would stay and work among her stricken people. The Marquis had died within twenty-four hours. No, not of the disease. Of grief. He had grasped that she was dead, and that he would never see her again. The maid was on her way to Poldec to arrange about Madame's cottage and property there.

"It appears that I fell there as one dead and lay ill for weeks.

"But no, I must not commit suicide or I might not enter the Heaven where she is . . . the Heaven that our Wise Men decided does not exist, when they turned God out of France. . . . But I must crucify myself in some way

or go mad. Physical pain and strife and stress alone can save me.

"I shall enlist in the Foreign Legion. Perhaps I shall earn an honourable death against the enemies of France.

"Oh, Rose of the World. Rosemonde, Rosemonde, Rosemonde——"

"Finished?" quoth Sergeant Baudré, approaching. "Dump him in that rice-mud. He'll be more useful dead than he ever was alive." . . .

VIII

"HERE ARE LADIES"

A SLUGGISH, oily river with mangrove-swamp banks; a terrible September day with an atmosphere of superheated, poisonous steam; and the two French gunboats, *Corail* and *Opale*, carrying a detachment of the French Foreign Legion, part of an expeditionary force entrusted with the task of teaching manners, and an enhanced respect for Madame la République, to Behanzin, King of Dahomey.

The Legionaries standing, squatting, and lying on the painfully hot iron decks, were drenched in perspiration. The light flannel active-service kits, served out to them at Porto Novo, clung wetly to their bodies. From under the big ugly pith helmets of dirty white, dirty white faces showed cadaverous and wan. For a month they had forced their way through the West African jungle, sometimes achieving as much as a mile an hour through the sucking mud of a swamp; sometimes thrusting their stifling, choking way through elephant grass

eight to ten feet in height; and again fighting through dense tangled bush with chopper, *coupe-coupe*, and axe. They had travelled "light," with only rifle and bayonet and one hundred and fifty rounds of ammunition, but even this lightness had been too heavy for some. The more coffee and quinine for the rest! To give variety to the sufferings of fatigue, fever, hunger, thirst, and dysentery, the Dahomeyans frequently attacked in the numerical superiority of a hundred to one. No mean opponents either, with their up-to-date American rifles and batteries of Krupp guns for long range work, and their spears and machetes for the charge.

As usual, the Legion was marking its trail with the generous distribution of the graves of its sons.

And now the VIIth Company had left swamp and jungle for the floating ovens *Corail* and *Opale*. Terrific heat, but no sunshine; the "landscape" minatory, terrible; life, the acme and essence of discomfort and misery. Even the Senegalese boatmen seemed affected and depressed.

"Say, John! Is this-yer penny-steamboat trip fer the saloobrity of our healths?" asked the Bucking Bronco, in a husky voice, of his neighbour le Légionnaire Jean Boule or John Bull. The old soldier wiped the sweat from his face with his sleeve.

"I overheard Commandant Faraux telling Colonel Dodds that there is a ford up here somewhere, and that it must be found and seized," he answered wearily. "I expect we're looking for it now."

"Well, *I* ain't got it. Search me!" said the American. "I allow Ole Man Farrow's got another think comin' if he . . ."—a ragged crash of musketry from the bank a hundred yards distant, and the ironwork of the *Opale* rang again under a hail of bullets.

In ten seconds the Legionaries were lining the sand-bagged bulwarks with loaded rifles at the "ready."

"Oh, the fools—the silly bunch o' boobs!" murmured the Bucking Bronco. "I allow thet's torn it! The pie-faced pikers hev sure wafted the bloom off the little secret."

"Yes," agreed John Bull, "you'd have thought even Behanzin's generals would have had the sense to lie low and not announce themselves until we'd got our column fairly tied up in the middle of the ford." . . .

The roar of Hotchkiss guns and Lebel rifles from the two boats drowned his further remarks, as well as the irregular crashings of the bursts of Dahomeyan musketry. . . .

The debarkation of the VIIth Company was

unhindered, the ford seized, and the safe passage of the Expeditionary Force guaranteed, the Dahomeyans having retired.

"Waal!" remarked the Bucking Bronco to his friend as half the VIIth Company moved off next morning, as Advance Guard. "Strike me peculiar ef thet ain't the softest cinch I seen ever. Guess Ole Man Behanzin ain't been to no West Point Academy. They say his best men is women—an' I kin believe it!"

"Amazons," remarked Jean Boule. "I pray we don't come across any. Fancy shooting at women."

"You smile your kind, fatherly smile at 'em, John, an' I allow they'll come an' eat outer yer hand. . . . Are they really fightin'-*gals*, with roof-garden hats an' shirt-waists, and mittens on their pasterns? . . . Gee-whiz! Guess I'll take a few prisoners an' walk with a proud tail!"

"They're women, all right," was the reply, "and I believe they are as dangerous as dervishes—apart from any question of one's not shooting to kill when they charge. . . . If all I've heard about them is true, chivalry is apt to be a trifle costly."

"Waal, John, as Légionnaires, we ain't habituated to luxury any, and can't afford

nawthen costly. Ef any black gal lays fer me with an axe—it's a smackin' fer hers."

"Yes—but what are we going to do if an Amazon regiment opens an accurate and steady fire on us with Winchester repeaters and then charges with the bayonet?"

"Burn the trail for Dixie," grinned the American. "I guess we'd hit the high places some, an' roll our tails for Home. *Gee*-whillikins! Charged by gals!"

"That's all very well," grumbled the Englishman, "but the Legion doesn't run, either from men or from women. If an Amazon regiment charges us, we've *got* to fight. . . . It would be ghastly."

Even as he spoke the deadly silent forest suddenly gave birth to thousands of black shadows, all moving swiftly and noiselessly, and from all directions, upon the tiny column of the Advance Guard.

With one accord, at some signal, they halted, rested the butts of their rifles on their thighs, fired, and then, howling like devils, charged with great *élan*, led by a number of tall, muscular women, handsome and finely made.

"*Gals!*" gasped the American, as the column instinctively halted, faced outwards in two ranks, and poured magazine fire into

the dense masses of the charging savages.

"*Look* at her!" he cried, and pointed to a young woman, who, bare to the waist, and wearing a fez cap, a short blue cotton kilt, and a leather belt and cartridge-cases, came bounding straight toward him. In her right hand she brandished a thick-backed, heavy chopping-sword like a *coupe-coupe* or machete, and in her left carried a bright new repeating-carbine. Nothing could have been more dashing, courageous, and inspiring than the leading of this Fury, as she rushed straight for the levelled rifles of the Legionaries, waving her men on and yelling mingled words of encouragement, threat, and taunt at them as she strove to bring them to the consummation of the charge.

Her efforts were in vain, however. The Dahomeyan male warrior is not of very heroic stuff, and does his best fighting in a surprised camp, a broken square, or against a scattered line. His *métier* is the ambush, the rush at dawn, the hacking and hewing hundred-to-one fight in dense jungle where the foe cannot form or charge, the tree-top sniping, the trampling flat of a worn-out enemy by sheer weight of numbers.

Before the steady fire of an unbroken line he generally wilts away, and vanishes shadow-

like into the impenetrable depths of his native jungle, to try another surprise, another ambush, another dawn-rush of ten thousand men, at the next opportunity.

As usual, beneath the accurate fire that mowed them down in swathes, the Dahomeyans broke and fled, slowly followed by their Amazon leaders, who shrilly cursed, and fiercely struck at, the retiring faint-hearts.

Just as the "cease-fire" whistle blew, the woman who had been charging at the Bucking Bronco and John Bull (and who had stood screaming at her followers as they halted, faltered, and broke) threw up her arms and fell.

"That weren't *me*," quoth the Bucking Bronco, "an' I hope it was a dod-gasted accident. She was some gal, that gal. Let's have a look at her if we ain't agoin' to charge nor nawthen."

The officer commanding the Advance Guard was certainly not going to charge. He was only too thankful to have beaten off the sudden and well-executed attack. How marvellously the brutes had materialized from the apparently uninhabited forest, still silent and gloomy as the tomb. But what *fools*! That force alone, properly handled, and attacking while the column was in the middle of the wide deep

ford, might have told a very different story.

"Bugler," called he, "blow the 'alarm' and the 'regimental-call' till your veins crack and your lungs burst. . . . No—turn toward the river, *sot*, I want the main body to hear. . . . Sergeant-Major, send two of the strongest running back with this." . . .

They were the last words he spoke. The Amazons themselves were charging this time —a whole regiment—and no regiment in this world ever charged with greater dash, courage, violence, and determination. Firing as they came, and utterly disregarding the steady magazine-fire of the Legionaries, they swept down upon them like an avalanche—like cavalry —and burst upon the little line, through it, and over it, like a hailstorm across a wheatfield.

Rushing at Captain Roux, one fired her Spencer carbine into his chest, while another drove a spear into his abdomen. As he fell, a third stooped and deliberately hacked off his head with her chopping-knife. There was no question of "sparing women" as these furies, each as big and strong and well-armed as any Legionary, hacked, hewed, and thrust, or, kneeling a few yards from their victims, gave them the contents of the magazines of their carbines. . . .

While parrying the fierce thrusts of one stalwart virago, John Bull, struck on the head from behind by two assailants at once, fell to the ground, even as his eye had subconsciously taken in and registered upon his brain a picture of his mighty friend swinging his rifle round and round his head by the muzzle, the butt describing a circle within which he stood unhurt as to his body, though apparently shocked in mind, to judge from his roar of "Scat! ye shameless jumpin' Jezebels!"

Without thought of defending himself, the bugler continuously blew the "alarm" and the "regimental call" (in the hope that it might carry back to the main body, which apparently had delayed longer at the ford than had been expected) until he went down with a bullet through his leg and another in his shoulder, two of seven fired at him from a score paces distance by a young Amazon. A minute later, the man rose to his knees and blew with almost undiminished strength, until the same young woman riddled his chest, at point-blank range, with another magazineful.

Recovering consciousness, John Bull saw a gigantic Amazon make a dive at the knees of the Bucking Bronco, ducking beneath the whirling rifle-butt. A moment later he was

down, but, instead of being hacked to pieces, was borne away, kicking and cursing, by a dozen powerful women.

Knowing what that meant, he would rather have seen his friend killed before his eyes. . . . As another wave of faintness swept over him, he heard the distant strains of "Tiens! Voilà du boudin"—the March of the Legion, and knew that the buglers of the column were sending the encouraging notes ahead of their straining bodies, as the remainder of the force hurried to the rescue. Poor Bugler Langout's message had carried on the heavy air, which seems to blanket the sound of rifle fire while transmitting that of a whistle, bugle, or war-drum to a surprising distance.

Heavy fire from the debouching troops saved the few survivors of the Advance Guard—but it was not until the whole column had fought a tough action in company squares, that the Amazons and the rallied and reinforced Dahomeyans acknowledged defeat, for that day at any rate, and disappeared shadow-like into the jungle as suddenly as they had come.

John Bull and the assistant-surgeon decided that the butt-end of a carbine had struck the former on the head, and that almost simultaneously a chopping-sword had struck the butt

of the carbine while it was in contact with his skull, inasmuch as his head bore no cut, there were splinters of wood in his hair, and a carbine with a hacked stock lay beside him when he was picked up and examined. He had nearly been handed over to the burial-party instead of to the carriers, and, when he realized that the Bucking Bronco had been carried off, he almost wished that this had actually happened. Most horrible stories of the fate of prisoners of the Dahomeyans were current throughout the expeditionary force, though no proofs of their truth had yet materialized.

When a list of the killed, wounded, and missing was made out, it was found that the Sergeant-Major had disappeared also, and one of the survivors remembered seeing him borne off in a surging crowd of Amazons, "like a band of big black ants carrying off an injured wasp," as he graphically described it.

That night John Bull, old Tant de Soif, the Grasshopper, Jan Minnaerts, Black Gaspard, Achille Martel, and one or two more of the *escouade* to which the Bucking Bronco belonged, volunteered to go out as a scouring-party to reconnoitre for the enemy, and, incidentally, to try to discover some traces of their missing comrade and the *sous-officier*.

"Let Jean Boule be in charge," said Lieutenant Roberte, commanding the remnants of the VIIth Company, *vice* Captain Roux, killed in action, "he has some sense, and can use the stars. If you fall into the hands of the enemy, I shall punish you severely—give you all a taste of the *crapaudine* perhaps. *Bonne chance, mes enfants.*" . . .

. . . . . .

"We must turn back, *mon ami*," said Martel to John Bull at last.

"But yes," agreed old Tant de Soif, "it is useless to throw good meat after bad. . . . They have died their deaths by now—or are being taken to the sacred city of Kana for sacrifice."

"I smell smoke," suddenly said the Grasshopper, wrinkling his delicate nostrils. "*Nom de Dieu!*" he added, "*and* burning flesh."

It soon became more than evident that he was right. Either they were approaching the spot where flesh was being burnt, or a faint breeze had sprung up and wafted the foul smell in their direction.

Treading like Dahomeyans themselves, they turned from the jungle track they had discovered, along another that lay plain in the moonlight across a little open glade, and seemed to lead in the direction of the smell. Thou-

sands of bare feet must recently have made the path—the feet of men hurrying along in single file. . . .

. . . .

Although scarcely recognizable as a human being, the Sergeant-Major, a huge stalwart Alsatian, was still alive.

Steel and fire had been used with remarkable skill, that so much could have been done and the spark of life still kept in the unspeakably tortured, defiled, and mangled body. A score of Amazons were at work upon him.

The Bucking Bronco, stark naked, but apparently uninjured, was bound to a young palm. Either he was merely awaiting his turn and incidentally suffering the ghastly ordeal of seeing the tortures of the Sergeant-Major and enduring the agonies of anticipation, or else he was being reserved as an acceptable offering to King Behanzin and a candidate for the wicker torture-baskets of the sacrificial slaughter-house of Kana.

"A volley when I shout," whispered John Bull, "then a yell and the bayonet."

A few seconds later he was killing women, driving his bayonet into their bodies until the curved hilt struck with a thud. The thuds gave him infinite pleasure—and then he was

violently sick. Surprised by the sudden volley, ignorant of the strength of their assailants, and only partly armed, the Amazons broke and scattered into the jungle. While John Bull, with shaking hands, prized at the Bucking Bronco's bonds with his sword-bayonet, old Tant de Soif put a merciful bullet into the brain of the Sergeant-Major and then busied himself about collecting the dismembered fragments of that unfortunate.

"For all the world like picking up an old woman's packages when she has slipped up on a banana-skin," quoth he. He was a quaint old gentleman, a *vieux moustache* who had seen many queer things in his forty years of assorted service in the Line, the Infanterie de la Marine, and the Legion.

"We daren't stay to bury him," said Martel; "they'll rally and return in a minute."

As the little party retreated at the *pas gymnastique*, the Bucking Bronco remarked to his friend, panting ahead of him, "Say, John! I allow I'm a what-is-it henceforth—an'-a-dern-sight-more. You know—a Miss-Hog-you-beast."

"A *what*?"

"A Miss-Hog-you-beast."

"Yes! What some people call a misogynist. I don't blame you!"

IX

THE MACSNORRT

THE MACSNORRT was on the downward path, and had been for many years. Physically, mentally, and morally he was deteriorating ; and as for the other aspects—social, financial, and worldly—he had been Chief Engineer on a Cunarder, and he was now the blackest of the black sheep of the VIIIth Company of the First Battalion of the Legion. From sitting at meals with the passengers in the First Saloon of a great liner, he had come to sitting with assorted blackguards over their tin *gamelles* of *soupe* ; from drawing hundreds per annum, he had come to drawing a half-penny per day ; his brain was failing from lack of use and excess of absinthe and mixed alcoholic filth, his superb health and strength were undermined, and he was becoming a Bad Man.

The history of his fall is told in one short word—Drink ; and drink had turned a fine, useful, and honourable man into a degraded

ruffian. The man who had thought of fame, wealth, inventions, patents, knighthood—now thought of the successful shikarring of the next drink, or the stealing of the wherewithal to get it. Whether this poor soul were married and the father of a family, I never knew, and did not care to ask, but it is quite probable that he was. Such men usually are. Let us hope he was not. Sober, he was a truculent, morose, and savage ruffian—ashamed of his ashamedness, hating himself and everybody else, dangerous and vile; a bad soldier till the fighting began, and then worth two. Drunk, he was exceedingly amusing, and one caught glimpses of the kindly, witty, and genial original.

. . . . .

The best of soldiers, be he *Maréchal* or *Soldat deuxième classe*, as was the MacSnorrt, may be overcome by a combination and alliance of foes, any one of whom he could defeat alone.

As the MacSnorrt endeavoured to make clear to Captain d'Armentières next day, it was merely the conjunction against him of a good dinner, Haiphong, the stupeedity of the Annamese male in wearing a chignon and a petticoat like a wumman, *shum-shum*, sunstroke, and his own beautiful but ardent disposition, that had been his undoing. With any one of these he

could have coped; by their unholy alliance he had been—he freely admitted it—completely defeated.

Captain d'Armentières heard him with courtesy, and awarded him eight days' *salle de police* and the *peloton de chasse* with sympathy.

He had known of similar fortuitous concatenations of adverse circumstance before in connection with le Légionnaire MacSnorrt.

It was the Captain's *ordonnance*, one Jean Boule, who had, luckily for that reveller, discovered the MacSnortt and encompassed his capture by a strong picket.

Passing a pagoda one night, he had heard, uplifted in monologue, a rich voice whose accents, or accent, he had heard before, that of the MacSnorrt, the Bad Man of the VIIIth Company, recently arrived in a draft from Sidi-bel-Abbès to reinforce the VIIth after certain painful dealings with the Pavillons Noirs, the "pirates" of the Yen Thé.

Mingled with, but far from subduing the vinous voice and hiccups of the MacSnorrt, were the angry murmurings, quick whispers, and the lisping and clicking voices of a native Annamese and Chinese crowd.

Was the fool interfering with those so-tender "religious susceptibilities," and intruding upon

priests and their flock in search of moral consolation and fortification? He had no business in there at all.

Following the wall and rounding a corner, Jean Boule came to a gate. Pushing it open gently, he looked in.

Reclining majestically upon the ground, his back against the wall, was the MacSnorrt. In his vast left paw was a bottle of *shum-shum*, the deadly, maddening spirit distilled from rice. Clasped by his mighty right arm to his colossal bosom, the MacSnorrt held—a *doi* or Sergeant of Tirailleurs Tonkinois![1]

The little man, his lacquered hat, with its red bonnet-strings on one side, his chignon in grave disarray, looked even more like a devil than was his normal wont, as he struggled violently to escape from his degrading and undignified situation.

It was clear that, if the Annamese could get at his bayonet, there would be a vacancy at the head of the clan of MacSnorrt and at the tail of the VIIIth Company of the Legion.

"Lie ye still, lassie," adjured the gigantic Legionary, as his captive struggled again vainly, for the great right arm was not only round his

[1] Known as *Les Jeunes Filles* to the Legion, by reason of their long hair.

waist, but round both his arms, and he could only pick at the handle of his bayonet with ineffectual finger-tips.

"Lie ye still, ye wee prood besom, or I'll e'en tak' ane o' the ither lasses to ma boosom," threatened the MacSnorrt, but softened the apparent harshness of the threat by a warm lingering kiss upon the yellow cheek of the murderously savage soldier.

He then applied the *shum-shum* bottle to his lips, poured a libation of the crude and poisonous spirit, and then frankly explained to his captive that he had not selected "her" from among the other "sonsie lassies" by reason of any superior beauty, but simply because he liked her saucy fancy-dress—quite like a *vivaandière*, and he had always had a tender spot in his hearrt o' hearrts for a *vivaandière*.

The enraged and half-demented Sergeant screamed to the little crowd of priests, loafers, coolies and Haiphong citizens to knife the foreign devil, or, taking his bayonet, to drive it in under his ear. . . . The crowd allowed "I dare not" to wait upon "I would"—for the moment.

"Aye! . . . Oo-aye! It's not Jock MacSnorrt that could reseest the blaandishments o' onny little deevil o' a *vivaandière*," confessed

the aged roué. . . . "It was for the sake o' the *vivaandières* I joined the French airrmy, ye'll ken—when I was an innocent slip o' a laddie. . . . Romaantic! . . .

"Aye—an' they're mostly fat auld runts wi' twa chins," he added, with a sudden fall to pessimism and confession of disillusionment.

"'Tis the ruin o' the British Airrmy, ye'll ken," he confided to the ugly crowd that gradually closed in around him, "that they hae no *vivaandières* to comfort the puir laddies. . . . Hae the Gorrdons onny *vivaandières*, I'll ask ye? The Seaforrths? The Caamerons? The Heelan' Light Infantry? The Royal Scots? . . . They hanna. It a' comes o' such matters being in the han's o' the Southrons—the drunken an' lasceevious deils. Look at the Navy. . . . Is there a ship o' them a'—fra' battleship to river gunboat—that has a *vivaandière*, I'm speirin' ye, lassie? There isna. . . . An' theenk o' the graan' worrk they could do for the puir wounded—instead o' they bluidy-minded, sick-bay orrderly deevils!

"Losh, maan! Contemplaate it!

> "Eh, Wooman in oor 'oors o' ease
> A settin' lightly on oor knees. . . .

"Lie still, ye haverin', snoot-cockin' besom

—an' I'll tell ye a' aboot the horrors o' a naval engagement—an' I seen hunnerds. I'll tell ye a' aboot the warrst o' the lot—when I lossed ma guid right arrm. Then conseeder what a deeference ane bonnie *vivaandière* lassie might ha' made . . ." A violent struggle from the insanely incensed and ferocious *doi*.

" *Wull* ye bide quiet, ma bonnie wean? Or shall I send ye awa' oot into the cauld warrld to airrn yere ain leevin'? Ye're awfu' sma' for sic a fate, ye'll ken, ma bairnie! An' this is no Sauchiehall Street, I'm tellin' ye. . . . Did ye see the wee-bit gunboats we came in, the morrn? Well, imaagine ane o' they ten times increased and multiplied, an', in fact, made a hantle bigger. I sairved in ane o' yon, but I shall not disclose in what capaacity—save an' except that it was honourable to me on the ane side an' to her Majesty on the ither. . . . *Wull* ye bide quiet like a respeckitable *tai-tai* or I'll hae ye awa' . . . .

" Eh! maan, a naval engagement's graand. Watter everywheer! On board, I mean. Everywheer. Gaallons o' it." . . .

" May a cat tread on your heart!" hissed the struggling *doi*. " May dragons tear you! May the bellies of mud-fish be your grave! May you be cast on a Mountain of Knives." . . .

"What did ye say, lassie? *Why* do they want watter on booarrd? *To hide the awfu' things that fall aboot!* Eyes, arrms, legs, noses, ears, toes, fingers—ye wouldna hae them lying there plain for the eye o' man to see? No! Gaallons o' watter. . . ."

"Bide ye quiet, *kuniang*, or ye won't be a *kuniang* much longer, I'm thinkin'. Aye! Dozens o' gaallons o' watter. Everywheer. Hoses playin' a' aboot the plaace. Pumps squirrtin' it. Inches o' it on the decks. An' *blood*! Ma certie! Lassie—ye'd never believe. Hunnerds o' gaallons o' watter, an' as the shells burrst a' aroond—what falls into the watter in a pairrfect hail?" . . .

"Devils draw your entrails!" panted the writhing *doi*.

"Eh? Bullets, d'ye say? That's wheer ye're wrang, lassie. Na! Na!—Eyes, arrms, legs, noses, ears, toes, fingers! Ye'd scarcely credit it. An' thousands o' gaallons o' watter! Juist to hide the awfu' sichts and sounds. . . . There'll be a gun-team working their gun in watter. Thousan's o' gaallons o' watter. Feet deep. An' a maan wull stoop to fish up a shell for the gun—an' what'll he bring up belike?"

"Be the graves of your ancestors torn open by pariah dogs and their bones devoured!"

cursed the Sergeant, getting one arm free at last.

" Bring up a shell, d'ye say, ma wean ? More likely an eye or an arrm or a leg, or a nose or an ear or a toe or a finger frae beneath that fearfu' flood. . . . Oo-aye ! Meelions o' gaallons o' water ! Feet deep. An' the bed o' that awfu' sea, a wrack o' spare-parts o' the human forrm divine ! Meelions o' gaallons o' watter. Yarrds deep on the decks. They always hae it the like o' that in a naval engagement. Aye—I seen hunnerds . . ." and the *doi* had got at his bayonet at last. Then the *bonze* struck heavy blows upon the big bell hanging near in its bamboo-frame support, and the crowd closed in. If the *doi* struck, they would hack and tear this foreign devil to pieces.

With a *weeeep* of steel on steel the bayonet cleared the scabbard and the *doi* struck at his captor's throat as John Bull sprang forward. But the sound of the drawing of the bayonet had an extraordinary effect on the MacSnorrt —and it was with the weapon held only in his left hand that the *doi* struck—and missed. Seizing him by the throat with both huge hands the Légionnaire scrambled to his feet and used him as a battering-ram in his headlong roaring drive at the closing knife-drawing crowd.

With a yell of "Ye dommed dirrty Jael!" he wrenched the bayonet from the little Annamese and flung him head-long as the crowd gave back.

John Bull sprang to his side, and the two in a whirling, punching, struggling plunge fought their way to the gate, burst through it—and were promptly arrested by the picket, opportunely passing.

With these new enemies the MacSnorrt did further battle, until a tap on the head from a Gras rifle in the skilful hands of Sergeant Legros brought him to that state in which he was perhaps best—unconsciousness.

X

"BELZÉBUTH"

WE were heavy sportsmen (*à l'Anglaise*) at Bellevue at that time. Not only did we lay out a race-course, but we imported hounds and performed the *Chasse au renard*. We got up point-to-point races and paper-chases. There were actually Ladies' races, and some folk went so far as to talk about pig-sticking.

"Of course, Madame Merlonorot will ride when she comes out to Algeria?" asked Madame Paës.

"*Dieu!* Rather!" replied Colonel Merlonorot of the Zouaves. "I am on the look-out for a good thing for her now. She wants all the equine perfections embodied in one Arab pony. Won't keep a string. . . . Too much bother. . . . Must have won a good race or two, must have been hunted by a lady, must hack quietly in both saddles, must trap, and be trusted to take no exception to camels, Arab music, whirl-

ing dervishes, or fireworks. Also he must make the promenade in the governess-cart upon occasion! What?"

"It's a far cry from the race-course to the governess-cart, isn't it?" inquired Madame Paës.

"Yes. But she'll expect me to produce all that in the next month—and not to spend more than about three thousand francs! . . . Let's know if you hear of anything that might meet most of the requirements—and available within the month, will you, dear Madame? Must be a racer, though—and that limits the field when you're looking for a hack. . . . She's great on Ladies' Point-to-Points, Hunt-races, *Chasse au renard*, and everything you can do on a horse. She would play *le polo* and would pursue the pig with a spear if I would consent!"

"I will remember, Colonel—and I have an idea. . . . Three thousand francs for a pony that meets all the specifications?"

"About that, and a thousand thanks. Must be young, thoroughbred, and something to look at—and be vetted sound all over, of course." . . .

Three thousand francs! It would mean Home this year instead of next. Paris in Spring! It would mean avoiding the awful

prostrating heat of *la canicule* for the babies—neither of them robust, both of them showing the signs of French babyhood kept too long in Africa's forcing-house. It might mean life to one or both of them, especially with the usual cholera, smallpox, typhoid, and dysentery epidemics about, as they grew weaker. And Guillaume needed his long-overdue leave badly. He was overworked, run down, ill, and his temper—never very good—was getting unbearable. Fancy having leave and being too poor to take it! What a shame it was that the condition of the majority of married junior officers of the XIXth Army Corps should be one of cruel grinding poverty, pitiful shifts to keep up appearances, and a weary, heart-breaking struggle to make ends meet. Well, one must "drag the lengthening chain" and, having once clasped it on, must take the consequences. One can't start life afresh in France at thirty odd—and, well, one can always hope, or nearly always. And one might win a prize in the Lottery. (Think of it! One's chief hope for a brighter future, a chance of winning a prize in the Lottery!) . . . Three thousand francs!

But young Belzébuth had never run a race in his life and never taken part in the *Chasse*

au renard nor the pursuit of the spear-threatened pig, unless, perhaps, when he had had an English master in Maroc. Still, he was a real picture, was rising seven, sound as a bell, quiet as a mouse, and undoubtedly thoroughbred.

He hacked in both saddles and was a fast and steady trapper—and took the babies for an airing daily. Certainly he had a turn of speed—and there was simply no tiring him.

He would take Guillaume (a very bad and nervous rider) for a ride in the morning, and in the trap to the barracks after breakfast. He would bring him home to lunch, and then take the babies for their drive in the evening.

Sometimes he would finish up the day by taking the trap to a distant villa when a dinner-party was toward. And when Guillaume was away on manœuvres or marches, Madame Paës, horse-woman born and bred, got her only riding.

Three thousand francs! And Guillaume had bought him for two hundred francs when Lieutenant d'Amienville—who ought not to be allowed to keep a pig or a pariah dog, much less a horse—went away. Starved, neglected, and dying for want of work, Belzébuth had looked a bad bargain at 200 fcs. A man ought not to go unprosecuted who buys a horse and uses a

motor-car, leaving the horse to the mercy of a rascally *homard* who feeds it on offal and never takes it out of the stall. Her heart had ached when she had seen the staring coat, blear eye, and overgrown hoofs of the walking skeleton that Lieutenant d'Amienville swore had cost him, raw, a couple of thousand francs. She could have hung her sun-hat on him in a dozen places. But she knew a good horse when she saw one. Had not her father run his own horses at Longchamps and Auteuil before he went bankrupt?

And, under her care, Belzébuth had soon changed into a picture of bright, sleek, healthy happiness, and had served them exceedingly well.

Could she make him worth three thousand francs before Guillaume returned from manœuvres, sell him to Colonel Merlonorot (her father's old comrade), and put the money into Guillaume's hand, saying, "Book the passages for Marseilles to-morrow, *mon ange.*"

Could she? For, the utmost screwing and scraping, the most optimistic view of the saleable value of the few goods and chattels, the estimating the cheapest and nastiest journey to Paris—left a gaping chasm of a good thousand francs between hope and realization of a holi-

day in La Ville Lumière. No, nothing could bridge it—unless Belzébuth would fetch three thousand francs instead of the three or four hundred they had expected. Five hundred was the highest Guillaume had ever dreamed of—and that was after a cheery dinner at some Mess and a little champagne.

Even five hundred would be a profit of a hundred and fifty per cent. she believed.

Yes—four hundred would be cent. per cent., and five would be half as much again.

What would three thousand be on two hundred? Fifteen per cent.? No, of course not. Fifteen hundred per cent.? It sounded impossible.

And of course it was impossible.

Still—she would add five pounds of *avoine* daily to Belzébuth's *blé* and *son*, and start training him while Guillaume was away. She would join the club of the *Chasse au renard* at once, and she would enter for the Ladies' Race in the Desert Point-to-Point, which would be run just three weeks hence at Bellevue.

But what a terrible plunge! A hundred francs to the *cercle*, and Heaven alone knew what oats were fetching. Or perhaps she could hunt three or four times only, and pay a small donation or something? And she could

certainly avoid getting the Beaune that Médecin-Major Parme had ordered her to take, since she had had malarial fever, and use the money for oats. But what a speculation! It is an ill-wind that blows no good at all—the fever had reduced her weight, and she could ride at about seven stone now.

But what would Guillaume say of the wasted money—if she failed? Well, it wouldn't be all waste, for Belzébuth's value would go up, in any case, if she hunted him well and he got a place in the Point-to-Point.

The proverbs say that where there is a will there is a way, and that Heaven helps those that help themselves.

She would simply *live* to sell Belzébuth to dear rich old Colonel Merlonorot for three thousand francs, as a racer, hunter, hack in both saddles, bright trapper, and confidential nursery-pony! For the next month she would give mind, soul, and body to winning the Desert Point-to-Point. . . .

. . . . . .

Belzébuth was taken for a long quiet ride next morning, and for another in the evening, and his mistress personally superintended his feed and toilet.

Next day he was introduced to a new and

glorious place where the going was beautiful and you went straight ahead between railings, with plenty of room and no obstacles.

He took his furlong burst on the race-course at a good pace, and improved daily at two, three, and four furlongs.

Madame Paës' notions of training were original, but based on the sound principle, " Train for what you have to do by repeatedly doing it—and work up gradually to the first doing."

After a week Belzébuth was doing his mile on the race-course and doing it uncommon well (as one or two observers noted). Also he went down the lane of jumps cleverly and willingly, beautifully schooled.

One morning, Colonel Merlonorot noticed Madame Paës at the meet, on a very likely-looking bay Arab—good in the legs, well ribbed up, high in the withers, and with a blood look about him. (" He liked the look of that beast. *Nom d'un pipe*, he did ! ")

Madame Paës had not hunted since she had scrambled about with the North Devons in Angleterre—a long-legged, long-haired Diana of fourteen (at a Devonshire school) on a fat pony.

She was now a tiny, slim, pale, big-eyed Diana of twenty-four—and as good as a jockey.

But she looked as though she had been too long in Exile (which was exactly the case), and fitter for a deck-chair on a homeward-bound liner than for a saddle in the hunting-field. . . .

When would they get off? How would Belzébuth behave? Would he belie his nursery mildness and go *fou* when it was a case of full cry and all away? Would the unwonted oats and the rousing on the race-course and over the jumps react unfavourably now for the weak-backed, weary rider? He was certain to be *méchant*, and might buck or bolt. Would trembling hands and aching arms be unable to hold him? How her back ached, too! . . . Dear old Belzébuth, be good! It's for the babies and Guillaume. . . . God knew she'd sooner be in bed than in the midst of this gay throng of strong and happy men and women, well-content, well-clad, well-fed. . . .

Well-fed! A melancholy fact. Madame Paës, wife of a French commissioned officer, was not well fed. A woman of the unselfish sort does not buy costly tonic-foods, dainties, and wines, and eat the money that is sorely needed for other things. For plain food she had no appetite. To people who have been brought up in a château atmosphere, an income

—which to *ci-devant* dwellers in Montmartre or the bourgeois suburbs is wealth—may be degrading poverty.

The Paës had expenses which it was due to their honour and proper pride to have—and which are not due to the honour and proper pride of the bourgeoisie. . . . And these expenses and the health of Guillaume and the babies came before food and clothes for Madame Paës, in Madame Paës' opinion.

* * * * *

A note of music from the clump of jungle that had swallowed up the hounds. A crash of the grand wild music. A line! Hounds are off and the first "run" is on.

Belzébuth commenced by a series of bounds, the outcome of a high and joyous heart, good feeding, and good condition. He felt a touch of the curb, arched his back in protest, and went along at a smart canter, a vision of dainty horse-flesh.

The jackal got into a vineyard, was put out again, and had to make for open country.

It was fine going, and Madame Paës let Belzébuth go. He went—and in five minutes the first rider behind the Master was Madame Paës, and she was holding Belzébuth in, or he

would have passed the Master's big Syrian-Barb who was doing his possible under Colonel de Longueville's fifteen stone.

When the end came, Madame Paës was in at the death, lengths ahead of the second arrival, and minutes ahead of the field. Belzébuth had hardly turned a hair, and the Master presented the rider with the brush and a compliment. Madame Paës took her pony home, the while the field jogged on to the next likely cactus covert.

In another week Belzébuth was doing two kilometres on the race-course, morning and evening.

At the next meet, a very long run (twenty-two kilometres, the Master said) was finished by a field of four arriving thus: the Master and Madame Paës together; Captain Dutoit of the Spahis, seconds later; fourth man, Major Bruil of the Chasseurs d'Afrique, minutes later. Rest nowhere—and strung out for miles. Belzébuth had been held, while the other horses had been spurred.

Belzébuth hunted twice more, and the hunt-correspondent of the "Depêche Algérienne" singled him out for high praise.

Madame Paës dropped race-course practice and hunting, and let him do exercise walks in

the compound on one day, and a point-to-point run on another.

Riding out alone to some scrubby, sandy jungle, she would endeavour to estimate a two-kilometre distance, note a clump of palms, a tree, a hut, a hillock, and other natural landmarks, and then ride from one to the other at Belzébuth's best speed.

Once she had a narrow escape of settling the question of Belzébuth's value, and all other values, finally. Emerging at a furious gallop from a cactus-strewn area, in which pace could only be maintained and disaster avoided by skilful " bending," she came upon a beautiful smooth patch with a gentle rise ending in—a *wadi* or gully, thirty feet deep and fifty wide. She realized the fact in time to bring Belzébuth round in a curve that missed the precipice by inches.

On the Wednesday before the Saturday on which the race would be run, Madame Paës took Belzébuth out for his last training gallop. In the middle of it she put him at a *terrasse,* a " bund," or low earthen embankment, round what had once been a cultivated field.

The three-foot banks Belzébuth preferred to clear. The four-foot variety he liked to treat

as on-and-offs—alighting on the two-foot top and leaving it like a bird.

This particular bank was a delusion and a snare.

Though fair-seeming to the eye on Madame Paës' side of it, on the other it was eroded, crumbling, beetling.

Belzébuth landed beautifully on the top—and horse and rider went down in a cloud of dust and an avalanche of clods and stones.

The horse turned a complete somersault across the woman.

But the flood that had caused the erosion had made some amends by scooping a channel at the base of the undermined bank, and instead of breaking every bone in Madame Paës' body and crushing her chest, Belzébuth's weight forced her into this channel and rested on its sides.

He arose and stood steady as a troop-horse.

His mistress lay still and white.

Soon she stirred, sat up—and straightened her tricorne hat. Then, too shaken to stand, sick and faint, giddy and stunned, not knowing whether she was seriously injured, she crawled to Belzébuth and examined his knees.

"*Oh! Thank God!*" she whispered, on

finding that, instead of being broken as she had expected, they were unmarked.

What did her own injuries matter so long as Belzébuth's knees were right?

A blemish there—and two hundred francs was his price.

An hour later, Madame Paës, looking like death on a bay horse, rode into the compound of her villa and went straight to bed.

Next day she could not move.

On the Friday she was better, but unable to get up.

On Saturday she would leave her bed and, if necessary, be carried downstairs, driven to the starting-point, and lifted on to Belzébuth.

Who could ride him for her at seven stone—and ride him as she would? Nobody.

All Bellevue was *en route* for the scene of the famous Bellevue Point-to-Point races, consisting of team-races for horses, another for ponies, a handicap, and an open race for quadrupeds of any size and bipeds of any weight.

Then came the Ladies' Point-to-Point, over two and a half kilometres of fairly good course and a few jumps.

The ordinary course was a stiff one, and so arranged that a really bold and resolute rider could shorten the distance on the average man

by taking *wadis*, and the other "places" that discretion would ride round.

The Ladies' Course included nothing that gave the stout heart and strong seat a marked advantage. So much the worse for Madame Paës, who was out, not so much to win a race and glory, as to win health and happiness, possibly life itself, for her children and husband.

A large crowd, on horseback for the most part, surrounded the tents (where the officers of the *Chasseurs d'Afrique* were "At Home"), the starting-point, and neighbouring winning-post.

Madame Paës lay in a long chair, with closed eyes—while the men's four races were run—limp, relaxed, and weary to death.

Oh, for a cushion to put under her weak and aching back!—and oh, for a *petit verre* of *eau de vie* to give her heart and strength! But her idolized Guillaume (a prig of the first water and petty domestic tyrant) did not "approve" of alcohol for ladies. There were so many things of which Guillaume did not "approve" for other people, though he appeared to approve of most things for Guillaume.

At last! The bell for the Ladies' Point-to-Point, the most popular and famous race in the Colony.

Madame Paës mounted Belzébuth and walked him to the starting-point.

Nine competitors.

Colonel Lebrun's wife on the pride of the Chasseurs (but a heavy, bumping, mouth-sawing rider who would spoil any horse's chance).

Madame Maxin on a characterless, unreliable racer.

Little Angélique Dandin, on her brother's one and only pony.

Madame Malherbe, cool, quiet, neat, and businesslike, on a light and dainty black mare with slender legs but powerful quarters.

Major Parme's wife on the best horse that her money could buy—but a woman who thought far more of hat, habit, and figure than of seat and hands.

Madame Deville, riding (astride) her husband's charger and intending to win if spur and quirt would do it.

Colonel de Longueville's wife, a fine horsewoman, handsome, smart, and clever, on the pick of her husband's racing-stable. And a couple of quidnuncs.

A bad field to beat.

Betting was on Madame Maxin if her horse " behaved." If he didn't, Madame de Longueville must win in a common canter.

Strangers liked the look of Madame Malherbe, but local wisdom knew her mare couldn't live with the other two.

General Blanc, starter, drew the attention of the ladies to a pair of red flags half a kilometre away, a pair of blue ones to the right of these and half a kilometre from them, another pair of red to the right of the "field," and a pair of white, at present behind their backs and some three furlongs distant.

"You must pass between the red flags, then between the blue, then the red, and lastly between the white, and finish here," said he. "There is nothing serious in the way of ditch or wall. Pick your own route—and any competitor not passing between the flags is, of course, disqualified."

A silly question from Madame Lebrun—politely answered.

All ready? . . . The flag falls.

Madame Paës thanked Heaven they were away at last.

A hundred yards from the starting-point is a brush-wood jump which must be taken—or a large patch of dense cactus-jungle skirted to the left or right.

Should she try and take it first of all?

She hated jumping in company. Yes. A

flick told Belzébuth he might stretch himself for a bit, and he cleared the jump ten lengths ahead of the next horse.

" *Nom de Dieu!* It's an ' outsider's year,' " said General Blanc. " Bar accidents, that's the winner. Who is she ? "

Madame Lebrun's horse—with a round dozen stone hanging on his mouth—refused ; the lady and the animal parted company, and the subsequent proceedings interested them no more.

Madame Parme elected to skirt the jungle, and was out of the race from that moment.

A quidnunc took alarm at the pace and pulled with all her strength.

The virtueless and evil-reputed racer drew level with Belzébuth, Madame Maxin spurring, and Madame de Longueville passed both.

Madame Paës was holding Belzébuth in from the moment he had cleared the first jump.

Madame Deville began flogging, like a jockey, in the first quarter-mile of the race, and passed Madame de Longueville with a spurt. Shortly after she took fifth place and kept it. . . .

Between the first flags passed Madame de Longueville with the wicked racer at her girth and Belzébuth at her tail, Madame Malherbe a dozen lengths behind, and Madame Deville thirty.

Angélique Dandin came later in the day, having lost her way. Neither quidnunc continued her wild career to this point. . . .

Gradually the distance between the leading three and the following two lengthened—and, for a kilometre, Madame Paës, Madame de Longueville, and Madame Maxin ran neck and neck.

Suddenly the bad-charactered racer took a line of his own, missed the next flags by a few metres, and bolted into the desert. At the second flags, Madame de Longueville led, Belzébuth consenting—or, rather, being made to consent; Madame Malherbe, creeping up, passed the flags three lengths behind, and Angélique Dandin, catching Madame Deville, led her through, a score lengths in rear. . . .

Madame Paës was filled with hope.

Should she let Belzébuth out yet? No, not till the last flags—if she could live so long—if her heart would beat instead of stabbing—if her brain would not reel so—if the blue mist would clear from her eyes.

(Those who had climbed to points of vantage shouted that Madame de Longueville would win in a walk—had led from the start—was going strong—except for that dark horse which seemed to manage to hang on. . . .)

A fairish jump ahead—should she pass Madame de Longueville? No, let her take it first, and let Belzébuth save himself for the three-furlong run home.

At the last flags Madame de Longueville led by twenty lengths, Madame Paës second, Madame Malherbe third, Angélique Dandin a neck behind, and Madame Deville, still flogging, a safe fifth.

And then Madame Paës gave Belzébuth a sharp flick, raised her bridle hand, and called to him.

The roar of applause and welcome to Madame de Longueville died down with curious suddenness as Belzébuth sprang forward, passed Madame de Longueville's lathered grey Arab as though he were standing, forged rapidly and steadily ahead, and, finishing in a quiet canter, won the race by a good furlong. Madame Paës reeled in the saddle and fell heavily into the arms of Colonel Merlonorot, who came forward to help her to dismount.

" Splendid! Splendid!" said he. " *Mon Dieu!* If I hadn't just bought my wife a horse, I'd ask if that pony of yours is for sale. You should run him at Longchamps!"

. . . " *If I hadn't just bought my wife a horse* " . . . what was he saying? " *If I hadn't just*

bought my wife a horse, I'd ask if that pony of yours is for sale." . . .

Then it was all for nothing—and money wasted!

Madame Paës fainted quietly and privately in a comfortable chair at the back of the empty reception-tent of the Spahis.

Colonel Merlonorot drove her home in his uncomfortable high dogcart—(quite *à l'Anglaise*).

Just time to change and rest before Guillaume arrived. . . .

He burst into her room, looking fagged, white, and weary—and his greeting, after five weeks' absence, was—

"What on earth have you been doing with my horse? It's as lame as a tree, and the *valet* has got its near fore in a bucket of hot water. . . . It's a shame, I say. . . . The only horse I have got, and you can't take a little care of it! What am I to do to-morrow? I suppose it doesn't trouble *you* that I must cycle to barracks in the sun? . . . *Peste!* . . . *Nom d'un Nom!* . . ." and much more.

Poor Guillaume! He was so overworked and ill—but she wept bitterly, and, lying awake all night, wished she were dead. But a note

was handed in at breakfast, next morning, from Colonel de Longueville, which ran :

" Dear Madame,

" I should like to offer my very hearty congratulations on your, and your pony's performance yesterday, and to ask whether your husband would take 4,000 fcs. for him.

" I gave that for the pony that Belzébuth left standing yesterday—so it's not a very brilliant offer. I should train him for bigger things.

" With my most distinguished regards and compliments,

" Henri de Longueville,

" Colonel."

Madame Paës, being very weak and tired, wept again.

XI

THE QUEST

EX-NO. 32867, *Soldat première classe*, shuffled out of the main gate of the barracks of the First Battalion of La Légion Étrangère at Sidi-bel-Abbès for the last time, and without a farewell glance at that hideous yellow building. He had once been Geoffry Brabazon-Howard, Esquire, of St. James's Street and the United Service Club, but no one would have thought it of the stooping, decrepit creature in the ill-fitting blue suit of ready-made (and very badly made) mufti, the tam-o'-shanter cap and blue scarf, from the *fourrier-sergent's* store. He looked more like a Basque bear-leader whose bear has been impounded, or an Italian organ-grinder who has had to pawn his organ—save that the rather vacant eye in the leathern face was grey and the hair, beneath the *beret*, of a Northern fairness. A careful observer (such as a mother or wife, had he had one to observe him) would have noticed that his hands shook

like those of an old man, that his eyes were heavy and blood-shot, as though from sleeplessness, and that his legs did not appear to be completely under control. A casual passer-by might have supposed him to be slightly drunk, or recovering from a drunken bout.

He had that day received his discharge from the Legion, his bonus as holder of the *médaille* and *croix*, his papers and travelling-warrant to any place in France, the blessing of his Captain, and the cheery assurance of Médecin-Major Parme that he was suffering from cerebro-spinal sclerosis, and would gradually but surely develop into a paralysed lunatic.

Certainly he felt very ill. He was in no great pain, and he regretted the fact. He would far rather have felt the acutest pain than the strange sensation that there was a semi-opaque veil between himself and his fellow-men, that he lived quite alone and unapproachable in a curious cloud, and that, although he slept but little, he lived in a dream. He was also much distressed by the feeling that his hands were as large and thick as boxing-gloves, that his feet had soles of thick felt, and that he had *fourmis* (pins-and-needles) in his legs. He would gladly have exchanged the terrible feeling of weakness (and imminent collapse) in the small of his

back for any kind of pain. And, above all things, he wanted *rest*. Not sleep! Heaven forbid. Sleep was the portal of a Hell unnameable and unimaginable, and the worst of it was that insomnia led to the very same place, and one lived on the horns of a dilemma. If one did things to keep oneself awake, they either lost their efficacy and one slept (and fell into Hell) or one got insomnia (and crawled there with racking, bursting head and eyes that burnt the brain).

Rest! That was it. Well—he had done his five years in the Legion and got his discharge. Why shouldn't he rest? He would rest forthwith, before he set out upon his Quest, the last undertaking of his life.

He sat down on the *pavé* in the shade of the Spahis' barracks and leant against the wall. In five seconds he was asleep.

Later, two gens d'armes passed. One turned back and kicked him. "Get out of this," said he tersely.

Ex-No. 32867 of the Première Légion Étrangère staggered to his feet with what speed he might.

"I *beg* your pardon," said he in English. "I am afraid . . ." and then he realized who and what and where he was.

Mechanically he walked back to barracks and made to enter the great main gate. The sentry stopped him, and the Sergeant of the Guard came up.

"By no means, verminous *pekin*,"[1] quoth Sergeant Legros. "Is this a doss-house for every dirty tramp of a broken-down *pékin* that chooses to enter and defile it?" and he ordered the sentry to fling the thing out. "But that a French bayonet must not be used as a stable-fork, I would . . ." he began again, but *Ex*-No. 32867 perceived that this was not the place of Rest, and shuffled away again.

Sergeant Legros spat after him. If there was one thing he hated more than a Legionary, it was a time-expired man, a vile dog who had survived his treatment and escaped his clutches. . . .

Ex-No. 32867 passed along the barrack wall, his eyes staring vaguely ahead. If he might not sit on the ground and could not get back to his *chambrée* and cot, where could he go for rest? He could not set forth upon his Quest until he had rested. His back was too near the breaking-point, his knees too weak, his feet too uncertain. There were seats in the gardens by the Porte de Tlemçen, if he could get so far.

[1] *Pékin* = civilian.

But in the Place Sadi Carnot he suddenly found that he had sat down. Well—he would. . . . He fell asleep at once. . . .

The gendarme seemed very suspicious, but that is only natural in a gendarme. Yes—the papers were apparently in order, but he would do well to remember that the gendarme had his eye upon him. He could go, this time—so, *Marche!*—and sit down no more for a siesta in the middle of the road. . . .

Where was it he had been going for a rest? . . . A bright idea—*Carmelita's!* She would let him rest, and, if not too busy, would see that he did not fall asleep and go to Hell. . . .

"Bon jour, mon ami!" cried Carmelita, as he entered the little Café de la Légion. "Che cosa posse offrirve? Seet daown. What you drink?"

Ex-No. 32867 raised his *beret*, bowed, smiled, and fell asleep across a table. Carmelita raised puzzled brows. Drunk at this time of day? She pulled him backward on to the wooden bench, untied his scarf, and, going to her room behind the bar, returned with an old cushion which she thrust beneath his head. He at once sat up, thanked her politely, and walked out of the café.

"Eh! Madonna! These English," shrugged

Carmelita, and resumed her work. If one stopped to notice the eccentricities of every half-witted Légionnaire, one might spend one's life at it. . . .

Ex-No. 32867 strolled slowly along to the railway-station, showed his papers to the Sergeant of the Guard on duty there, sat him down, and went to sleep. Five minutes later he arose, approached the ticket-office, tried hard for a minute to penetrate the half-opaque veil that hung between him and his fellow-men, and then sat down beneath the *guichet* and went to sleep. . . .

The station-master was doing his best to make it clear that he hated filth, dust, dead leaves, stray pariah dogs, discharged Legionaries, and similar kinds of offal to remain unswept from the clean floor of his station.

The awakened man peered hard through the half-opaque veil that hung between him and the great man, made a mighty effort of concentration, and then said quite distinctly:

"I want a third single to Oran. I am starting on my Quest, after waiting five years."

"Then wait another five hours, Mr. Discharged Legionary," said the functionary, "and come again at 9.20 for your third single to Oran—if you are not too drunk. Meanwhile,

you cannot sleep here, unless it is in the permanent-way with your ugly neck across a rail."

The time-expired considered this.

"No, I go on a Quest," said he, and the station-master, with a gesture of a spatulate thumb in the direction of the door, indicated that the sooner the son of a camel commenced it the better for all concerned.

He was an unsympathetic person—but then he was held responsible when unconsidered trifles of Government property were stolen from the station precincts. And it is well known that a Legionary will steal the wall-paper from your wall while your back is turned, cut it up small, and try to sell it back to you as postage-stamps as soon as darkness sets in.

Ex-No. 32867 got to his feet once more, marched mechanically to barracks, was somewhat roughly handled by the guard at the order of Sergeant Legros, and, having staunched the bleeding from his nose, split lip, and cut cheek with the lining of his *beret*, made his way to the Café de la Légion. Entering, he bowed to Carmelita with a dignified flourish of his pulpy *beret*, fell at full length on the floor, and went to sleep.

"Queer, how differently drink takes different people," mused Carmelita, as she again

applied the cushion to supporting the battered head—and yet she had hitherto known this Guillaume Iyoné or Dhyoni (or William Jones !) of the IIIrd Company, as a soldier of the soberest and quietest. Quite like old Jean Boule of the VIIth. Doubtless he had been "wetting his discharge papers." Apparently he had done it to the point of drowning them.

At *l'heure verte, l'heure de l'absinthe*, the café began to fill, and for a time the sleeper was undisturbed by the *va et vient* of Carmelita's customers. . . .

"'Ullo, Cocky!" remarked le Légionnaire 'Erbiggin ("'Erb"), entering with his compatriots Rupert and John Bull, followed by the Grasshopper and the Bucking Bronco. "Gorn to yer pore 'ed, 'as it? Come *hup*—an' 'ave s'more," and he sought to rouse the sleeper.

"Strike me strange ef it 'ent thet *com*-patriot o' yourn, John," said the Bucking Bronco. "Willie the Jones, o' the IIIrd Company. . . . Guess he's got a hard cider jag. Didn't know he ever fell off the water-cart any."

"William Jones" sat up.

"Really, I *beg* your pardon," he said. "I thought I . . ." and then peered through the heavy blanketing veil that was daily thickening between him and his fellow-men.

"He's no more drunk than I am," said John Bull. . . . "I suppose he's just discharged. I thought he was in hospital. . . . Looks as though he ought to be, anyhow."

"I have rested, and I must begin my Quest," said "William Jones," *Ex*-No. 32867. "I have a glorious Quest to undertake, and I have little time. I . . ."

"Yus. *Ingk*quest's abaht your mark, Cocky," observed 'Erb. "Crowner's ingk-quest."

"Help me up," added the sick man. "I must begin my Quest."

"*De sot homme, sot songe,*" murmured La Cigale, shaking his head mournfully. "I too have Quests, but they tangle and jangle in my brain—and folk say I am mad or drunk. . . . Some will say you are mad, *mon ami*, and some will say you are drunk."

"Are you going to England?" asked John Bull, as he helped the man to his feet.

"England? . . . England? . . . Oh, yes. I am going to England. Where *should* I go? She lives in England," was the reply.

"Have you friends?"

"She is my Friend. Of Friendship she is the Soul and the Essence."

"*Chacun aime comme il est,*" remarked the

Grasshopper. "This is a gentleman," and added, "*Il n'y a guère de femme assez habile pour connaître tout le mal qu'elle fait.*"

"I allow we oughter take him daown town to the railway deepôt and see him on the cars," put in the Bucking Bronco. "Ef we don't tote him thar an' tell him good-bye, it's the looney-house for his. He'll set down in the bazaar and go as *maboul*[1] as a *kief*[2]-smoker." . . .

"I was going to say we'd better see him off," agreed John Bull. "If he gets to England, he'll have more chance than as a discharged Legionary in Algiers—or France either. Wish we could get an address from him. We could tie a label on him."

But they could not, and after the Bucking Bronco had procured him food from Carmelita's "pie-foundry," as he termed her modest *table d'hôte*, they took him to the station and, under the cold eye of the Sergeant of the Guard at the platform gate, saw him off. . . .

As one in a dream, as one seeing through a glass darkly and beholding men as trees walking, *Ex*-No. 32867, William Jones, *alias* Geoffry Brabazon-Howard, Esquire, made his way to London. There is a providence that watches

[1] Mad. [2] Hemp.

over children and drunken men, and *Ex*-No. 32867 was as a compound of both. He knew he was exceeding ill and quite abnormal in some directions, such as never being *quite* certain as to whether he was really doing and experiencing things, or was dreaming; but what he did not realize was that, concurrently with severe insomnia, he was liable at any moment to fall suddenly asleep for a few minutes, wherever he might be, and whatever he might be doing. He was aware that he had brief periods of "abstraction," but was quite unaware that they were periods of profound slumber. Unfortunately they only endured for a few seconds or a few minutes, and, though serving to place him in endless dangerous, ridiculous, and awkward situations, did not amount to anything approaching a "living-wage" of sleep—rarely to more than an hour in the twenty-four and generally to much less.

At times he was, for a few hours perhaps, entirely normal, to all appearances; and could talk, behave, and transact business in such a way that no casual observer would be aware of anything unusual in the man. He himself, however, when at his best, was still aware of the isolating-medium in which he moved and lived and had his being; the slowly thickening

cloud, the imponderating veil, that shut him in, and cut him off, with increasing certainty and speed.

What would happen when he could no longer pierce and penetrate this fog, or wall, of cloudy glass; this vast extinguisher of sombre web, and could hold no communication with the outer world?

Was he becoming an idiot before becoming a paralytic, and thus having the gross presumption to reverse the order of things foretold by Médecin-Major Parme?

On arrival at Charing Cross, he had strolled idly through the streets of London, slept on a bench in Leicester Square; had thought he was in the public gardens outside the Porte de Tlemçen at Sidi-bel-Abbès, and hoped that the Legion's famous band would come and play its sad music in that sad place; and, being "moved on," had wandered away, dazed and bewildered, going on and on until he reached Hammersmith. Here he found his way into one of those Poor Man's Hotels, a Rowton House—vaguely under the impression that it was some kind of barrack.

Here he had a glorious time of Rest, broken only by the occasional misfortune of having a night's sleep, or rather a nightmare in the unnameable Hell to keep out of which he exerted

all his failing faculties. And at the Hammersmith Rowton House he became an object of the intensest interest to such of his fellow-inhabitants of that abode of semi-starvation and hopeless misery as were not too deeply engulfed in their own struggle with despair and death to notice anything at all.

For "William Jones" began to blossom forth into a "toff," a perfect dook, until it was the generally accepted theory that he was a swell-mobsman just out of gaol, and now working the West End in the correct garb of that locality.

Little by little the man had replaced his old clothes by new, his *beret* by a correct hat, his scarf by the usual neck-wear of an English gentleman, his *fourrier-sergent's* suit of mufti by a Conduit Street creation, his rough boots by the most modish of cloth-topped kid; and generally metamorphosed William Jones, late of the Foreign Legion, into Geoffry Brabazon-Howard, Esq., late of St. James's Street and the United Service Club.

In one of his hours of mental clarity and vigour, he had called at his bank and drawn the sum of ninety pounds, left at current-account there when he disappeared into the Legion; and in another such hour (and in his

new clothes) had called at his Club, seen the secretary, and arranged for the revival of his lapsed membership.

It had taken both the bank-manager and the secretary some time to recognize him, but they had done so eventually, and had been shocked to think of what the man must have been through to have changed as he had, and to look as he did.

He *had* been through a good deal. In addition to the very real hardships of campaigning in the Sahara as a private of the Legion, he had had black-water fever and dysentery, had been wounded in the abdomen by an Arab lance, carried away by the Arabs while unconscious from loss of blood from this wound, and kept until he should recover consciousness and be eligible for torture. (It is pointless to torture a practically dead person.) The badness of his wound had saved his life, for by the time he had sufficiently recovered to be interesting to his captors, they were attacked and routed, and "William Jones" had been restored to the bosom of his company only slightly tortured after all. The shock to an enfeebled man, who was also suffering from a hideous wound, had been considerable, however.

Thereafter, enteric had done little to improve

his health, and his resultant slowness and stupidity had earned him the special attention of Sergeant-Major Suicide-Maker and Sergeant Legros.

So there is little wonder that his banker and club-secretary were shocked at the change in him, and wondered how many days or weeks he had to live.

And to the secretary, who saw him almost daily, it was clear that the poor chap was sometimes queer in the head too—and no wonder, looking as awfully ill as he did.

For example, one day he would walk into the Club, sit down on the Hall-Porter's stool, and go to sleep immediately!

Another day he would do the same thing on the stairs, or even the front steps.

If he sat down in a smoking-room arm-chair and fell asleep, as is a member's just and proper right, he would spring up if anyone approached, say, "I really *beg* your pardon. I am afraid I . . ." and walk straight out of the Club.

What would the worthy secretary have thought had he known that Geoffry Brabazon-Howard, Esquire (once of the Black Lancers), walked daily to the Club from the Hammersmith Rowton House in the morning and back to that same retreat in the evening; and that

such food as he ate, was eaten in his cubicle there, or at a coffee-stall? At a Rowton House one has the "use of the fire" in the basement for one's cooking purposes, but Geoffry was a most indifferent cook, and it is difficult to purchase really cookable provisions on a sum of fourpence a day. For this was the amount that he had decided upon as the irreducible minimum to be expended on food if he were to keep up the strength required for the daily journey to the West End and back. After paying for his clothes and setting aside his club fees, he would have enough to live on at this rate, until the London season and through it, if he were very, very careful. He would have to renew some of his clothing, perhaps, later on—boots, linen, ties—and there were always incidental and unavoidable expenses. However, with great care and a little luck, he could last to the end of the season and pursue his Quest. And this great absorbing Quest, which had made him expend his all in fine clothing, club membership, and the appearance of being a "person of quality" and a gentleman of means and leisure?

Merely to come face to face with, to meet on terms of equality, to have just one encounter and conversation with—a woman.

Before he died he must see, and speak to, Peggy once again—to Lady Margaret Hillier—because of whom he had vanished into the French Foreign Legion, and of whom he had thought daily and nightly ever since.

He had had a thin time, he was near the end of his tether, life held nothing for him, and he had no desire to prolong it—but before he lay down for the last time he *would* see Peggy again, hear her voice, feast his eyes on her beautiful face, and his ears on the sound of her words and laughter, yea, feast his very soul upon the banquet that it had dreamed of—and then he would have no further use for clubs, fine clothes, a penny chair in the Park, nor anything else.

The ass was quite mad, you perceive. . . .

Now one *can* live on fourpence a day, and for a very long time too. If one starts in robust health and strength, one can maintain an appearance of health and the power to work for a quite surprising period. But if one is really very ill, on the verge of a nervous collapse, and badly in need of a rest-cure with special diet, tonic, and drugs—fourpence a day is not enough.

They give you a surprisingly filling meal at certain coffee-shops and cocoa-houses (like

Pearce-and-Plenty or Lockhart's) for fourpence, but one meatless meal per diem is not enough. It is, on the whole, better to have two pennyworth at dawn and two pennyworth at sunset, and a good drink of water at midday. Better still is it, if you are really experienced in the laying-out of money, to have a pennyworth at dawn, two pennyworth at midday and a pennyworth at sunset. (You can go to bed with a full stomach by supping on a quart of water.)

But Geoffry had not complete liberty in the matter. One cannot go for a twopenny midday meal in a silk hat, faultless morning coat buttoned over the white waistcoat of a blameless laundress, and in patent cloth-topped boots. Geoffry was, by force of circumstances, debarred this thrice-a-day system of feeding, and was constrained to breakfast (in rags) at an early coffee-stall and to dine at the same, in the same decrepit clothing, late at night. After breakfast he would return to his cubicle, dress for the Club, and creep forth, still in the early hours of the morning. (One attracts attention if, in the broad light of naked day, one issues from a Rowton House in the correct garb of Pall Mall and Piccadilly.) At night he would undress, carefully fold his immaculate clothes, don his rags, and sally forth to dine

on twopence. The coffee-stall keeper regarded him as a broken-down torf and eke a balmy, but coffee-stall keepers are a race blasé of freaks, social, moral, and mental.

Between these meals Geoffry Brabazon-Howard pursued his Quest. He went to his Club and listened eagerly for "society" gossip, and read "society" papers (of the kind that inform the public when Lady Diana Blathers dines at the Fritz, and photographs her inhaling the breath of an abortive animal, apparently a bye-product of the dog-industry; announces the glad tidings that Mrs. Bobbie Snobbie has returned to Town; or that the Earl of Spunge was seen scratching his head in Bond Street yesterday). Having sought in vain for news of Lady Margaret Hillier, he slowly paraded the fashionable shopping thoroughfares, and then, utterly weary, turned into the Park, selected an eligible site for seeing the pedestrians, carriage-exercisers, and riders, and sat for hours watching and waiting, hoping against hope—as he thought. In point of fact he spent a great portion of this time in dropping asleep and being awakened by nearly falling off the chair. He was sometimes tempted to expend this chair-penny in food, but restrained the base cravings of his lower nature. He pictured

himself arrayed in the correctest of dress, nonchalantly seated on a Park chair, gaily observing the gyrations of the giddy throng of fashionable human ephemeræ—suddenly seeing Peggy, and rising, accosting her with graceful badinage, airy flippancy, and casual interest. Peggy would laugh and talk amusingly and lightly, he would beg her to come and lunch with him at the Club, or take tea if such were the hour ; he would feast his eyes and ears and soul as he had promised himself—and *then* ?—then he would lay down his arms and cease to fight this relentless Foe—sickness, disease, and death—that besieged him day and night, and sought to prevent his walk to the Club, sought to thwart the pursuit of his Quest. Having seen Peggy again, heard her laugh and speak, looked into her hopelessly perfect and wonderful eyes, he would surrender the fortress he no longer wished to hold, and would permit the Enemy to enter—trusting that *le bon Dieu, Le Bon Général*, would see to it that, for a broken old soldier, death was annihilation, peace, and rest. . . .

Daily he grew thinner, as a sick man living on fourpence a day must, and frequently he would finger the sovereign that always lay in his waistcoat pocket—ready for the day when

Peggy should lunch at the Club with him. It is not wholly easy to keep a sovereign intact while you slowly starve and every fibre of your being craves for tobacco, for brandy, for food —as you smell choice Havanas in the Club smoking-room, see fat, healthy men drinking their whiskies and brandies, and when you are violently smitten by rich savours of food as you pass the door of the dining-room.

The fragrance of coffee and eggs-and-bacon! The glimpse of noble barons of beef on the sideboard! The sight of tea-and-toast at four in the afternoon when you have had nothing since four in the morning! But the sovereign remained intact. With that he and Peggy could have an excellent lunch—without wine—and Peggy never touched wine. . . .

. . . . .

He started to his feet.

"I really *beg* your pardon! I am afraid I . . ." A stranger had awakened him as he slept in a smoking-room arm-chair. . . . He did not recollect how he came to do such a thing when he should have been in the Park. . . . *What* was the man saying—"Ill?"

"I was afraid you were ill. To tell the truth, I jolly well thought you were dead for the moment. Let me drive you to my doctor's.

Splendid chap. Just going that way. . . . No—don't run away."

"Most awfully kind," replied Geoffry, peering through the veil, "but I'm *quite* all right. Just a bit tired, you know. I am going to have a real Rest soon. . . . At present I have a Quest."

The poor devil looked absolutely *starved*, thought Colonel Doddington. Positively ghastly.

"Come and have some lunch with me," he said, "and let me tell you about this doctor of mine, anyhow."

Geoffry flushed—though it was remarkable that there was sufficient blood in so meagre a body and feeble a heart for the purpose.

Lunch! A four-course lunch in a beautiful room—silver, crystal, fine napery, good service—perhaps wine, certainly alcohol of some sort, and real coffee. . . .

It was a cruel temptation. But he put it from him. After all, one was a gentleman, and a gentleman does not accept hospitality which he cannot return, from a stranger.

"Awfully sorry—but I *must* go," he replied. "I'm feeding out." He was—late that night, on twopence.

He fled, and outside mopped his brow. It *had* been a terrible temptation and ordeal.

For two pins he would go back and have a brandy-and-soda at the cost of two days' food. No, he dared not risk collapse—and two days' complete starvation would probably mean collapse. Collapse meant expense too, and money was time to him. The expenditure of more than fourpence a day would shorten the time of his Quest. A day lost, was a chance lost. She might pass through London at that very time, if he lay ill in the Hammersmith Rowton House.

That night he had to take a 'bus home or lie down in the street. Next day, dressing took so long and his walk to the Club was so painful and slow, that he had to omit the Bond Street, Regent Street, and Piccadilly walk, and go straight to the Park.

There he had shocking luck. A zealous but clumsy policeman rendered him First Aid to the Fainting with such violence that he spoilt the collar and shirt-front that should have lasted another two days. Why could not the worthy fool have left him to come out of his faint alone? He went *into* it alone, all right. And there was an accursed, gaping crowd. Nor could he give the policeman two pennies, and so gave him nothing—which was very distressing. A most unlucky day!

Well—the days of his Quest were numbered, and the number was lessened.

Next day he found the Enemy very powerful and the tottering fortress closely beset. He would be hard put to it to walk to the Club —but come !—an old Legionary who had done his fifty kilometres a day under a hundredweight kit, over loose sand, with the thermometer at 120° in the shade ; and who had lived on a handful of rice-flour and a mouthful of selenitic water in the Sahara—surely *he* was not going to shirk a stroll from Hammersmith Broadway to Pall Mall and round the Town to the Park ?

He had got as far as Devonshire House, when a lady, who was driving from the Berkeley Hotel, where she had been lunching, to the Coburg Hotel, where she was to have tea with friends who were taking her on to Ranelagh, suddenly saw him and thought she saw a ghost. As her carriage crawled through the crush into Berkeley Street it brought her within a yard of him.

She turned very pale and lay back on the cushions. Immediately she sat upright again, and then leaned towards him. It *could* not be ! Not this poor wreck, this shattered ruin—her splendid *Geoff*—the Geoff who had seemed to

love her, five years ago, and had suddenly dropped her, and so been the cause of her marrying in haste and repenting in even greater haste, to the day of her widowhood.

"*Geoff!*" she said.

He raised his hat with a trembling hand and his face was transfigured. . . . Was he dying on his feet, wondered the woman.

"Get in, Geoff," she said, and the footman half-turned and then jumped down.

Geoffry Brabazon-Howard, with a great and almost final effort, stepped into the victoria.

"Will you come to lunch with me at . . ." he began, and then burst into tears.

Later, it was the woman who wept, tears of joy and thankfulness, after the agonizing suspense when the great specialist staked his reputation on his plain verdict that the man was not organically diseased. He was in a parlous state, no doubt, practically dying of starvation and nervous exhaustion—but nursing could save him.

Nursing did—the nursing of Lady Peggy Brabazon-Howard. . . .

XII

"VENGEANCE IS MINE . . ."

AS Jean Rien expressed it, he was *bien touché*; as le Légionnaire 'Erbiggin put it, he had got it in the neck; as the Bucking Bronco "allowed," his monica was up; as Jean Boule saw, he was dying.

One cannot blame him, since an Arab lance had pinned him to the ground and an Arab *flissa* had nearly severed his arm from his shoulder.

Jean Rien evidently blamed himself however, and for many things—chief among them a little matter of parricide, it seemed to Jean Boule, as he bent over him in his endeavour to comfort and to soothe.

"In much pain, *mon ami*?" the old soldier asked, as he moistened the dying man's lips and forehead.

"Little of body, but in great pain of mind. . . . I would confess to you, Père Boule. . . . I would ease my soul. . . . I would ask if you

think I am a murderer. . . . I have not blamed myself until now that I am dying. . . . Now I am afraid. . . . Look you, Père Jean Boule, I was brought up by my mother (*le bon Dieu* rest and bless her soul) with one purpose in life, with one end to fulfil, with one deed to do. Nothing earlier can I remember than her making me repeat after her the words of a promise and an oath. Night after night, as I went to bed, morning after morning, as I arose, I said my prayers at her knee, and followed them by this promise and this oath which she had taught me. Never did we sit down to a meal, never did we rise from one, without this formula. From my very birth I was dedicated, and my life was devoted and avowed, to the fulfilment of this promise, the keeping of this oath. . . . Hear it. . . . '*I, Jean-Without-A-Name, son of Marie Duval and Ober-Leutnant von Schlofen of the Hundred and Thirty-ninth Pomeranian Regiment, do most solemnly swear, that from my seventeenth birthday I will devote the whole of my mind and will, my strength and skill, my time and my money, to finding the man who in* 1870 *was Ober-Leutnant von Schlofen and who is my father, the torturer of my mother and the murderer of my mother's beloved husband, Jacques Duval.*

I do most solemnly swear that, having found him, I will call him "Father," I will torture him, as he tortured my mother, and I will kill him even as he killed him who should have been my father, so help me God and the Blessed Virgin. Amen.' . . .

"Yes, my friend, morning, noon, and night I repeated this after my mother, and at the conclusion of each repetition this poor soul, who loved and hated me, and whose heart was buried in the pit in which lay Jacques Duval and many more, would kiss me on the brow, and say, 'Thou art the instrument of God's vengeance.' For sixteen years she did this, and on my seventeenth birthday gave me a knife that had belonged to Jacques Duval, together with her savings of seventeen years. The knife had killed poor Jacques, and the money was to help in his avenging by means of the knife. . . . Mad? Yes, mad as ever a human being was, poor soul. . . . But think of what she saw and suffered. . . . Married a week before war broke out, her husband torn from her arms to march away to fight, perhaps to be maimed and mangled, perhaps to die. . . . Months of solitude. . . . Rumours. . . . Hopes. . . . Soul-sickening fears. . . . Can you not see her in their little house

—where they were to have been so happy—waiting, hoping, fearing? And then, one dark night, a heavy tramp of soldiers, screams, red-reflections lighting up the clean little room in which she slept, and then—blows on her door, harsh guttural shouts, and the crash of the burst-in door. . . .

"For a fortnight the Herr Ober-Leutnant von Schlofen, in command of the detachment that had occupied the little village, made her house his headquarters, and as, from the first moment, she had defended herself tooth and nail, Marie Duval spent that time, bound hand and foot, and locked in her little room. At first, when she was untied, that she might eat and drink, she refused, but when pain, horror, grief, and every other anguished feeling had merged into a very madness of passion for revenge, she ate and drank, that she might have strength to slay. . . .

"And the night that her teeth met in the Herr Ober-Leutnant's throat, her Jacques came back wounded, and they caught him and brought him to this foul and filthy von Schlofen swine of Germany. . . .

"On learning they were husband and wife, von Schlofen confronted them in their bonds—she, half-dead with shame, exhaustion, and

misery; he half-dead with wounds and the brutality of his captors. Then, while two of his vile bloodhounds held the woman, four others flung the man face downward over the kitchen table, placed a pail beneath his head, and von Schlofen cut his throat from ear to ear with that same knife. . . .

"Thereafter they flogged Marie Duval with the Herr Ober-Leutnant's switch that she might learn obedience and gratitude, and that he might find her tamer. . . .

"Mad? Oh yes, quite more than a little mad, this poor Marie Duval. . . . And when I was born, she dedicated me, as I say, her instrument of vengeance, so that on my seventeenth birthday I took train for Strasburg and the beginning of my quest. I had no great difficulty in tracking down this von Schlofen, who had become Colonel of the Hundred and Thirty-ninth Pomeranian Regiment, and then retired to his large estates in Silesia.

"When not hunting the boar and the deer there, he spent most of his time in an ancient, gloomy house in Thorn. And in Thorn I took up my abode and worked at my trade of carpenter. . . .

"I shall never forget my first sight of the

man who was my father and my quarry; the man who gave me birth and whom I had been brought up, by the loving mother who hated me, to kill with the knife that had killed the man who should have been my father. My heart beat so fast that I feared I should faint or suffocate and die with my life's purpose unaccomplished. I gripped the haft of the knife beneath my blouse, the haft of the knife whose blade this barbarous German brute had driven into the throat of Jacques Duval, and which I was to drive into his own fat neck as I had been taught and trained to do. . . . Oh yes, taught and trained. Did I tell you how Madame ma mère daily practised my hand at knife-strokes? Never a pig was killed within miles of our village but I must be taken to see the doing of it, while I was a child, and to do it myself when old enough.

"No opportunity was I allowed to lose of driving my knife to the hilt in any dead animal, into anything in which a knife could be driven.

"I can hear her thin and bitter voice at this moment, see the wild glare in her eye as she gloated beside me while I stuck some neighbour's pig and the blood gushed warm into the blood-tub.

"'*Ohé*,' she would cry. '*Gobbets of flesh*

and gouts of gore! So shalt thou bleed the foulest pig in all that Prussian sty, thine own father, thou accursed little devil. God and the Blessed Virgin reward and bless thee, my angel.' . . .

"*Oui, mon vieux,* a strange upbringing for a child, *hein*?

"And when I first beheld him, my father, the foulest pig in all that Prussian sty, I looked at the spot beneath his ear where I should strike and bleed him as he bled Jacques Duval —ere I cut his throat from ear to ear, as he cut the throat of Jacques Duval." . . .

Jean Rien closed his eyes and fell silent.

"Well, 'e might 'a finished 'is tile afore 'e 'opped it," remarked le Légionnaire 'Erbiggin, with apparent callousness, belied by his sympathetic, unhappy countenance. "So fur as I could onnerstan' 'im, 'e wos agoin' ter do 'is pore ol' farver in. . . . . 'Ere, give 'im a suck o' this *bapédi*," he added, as he produced a small medicine bottle half-full of the fiery fig-spirit.

"No," replied John Bull; "only increase the bleeding, if he is not dead. All the better if he has fainted."

Jean Rien opened his eyes.

"I can scarcely see you, Père Jean Boule,"

he murmured. "It is as dark as it was in that room where he lay when at last I had him at my mercy. . . . Yes, at length, after months of weary waiting for my opportunity, months of practice at the burglars' trade, months of scheming and study of the big house where the Pettenkoferstrasse joins the Baseler Alee, he lay before me on his bed, the moon shining on his white face. The hour for which I had been in training for two-and-twenty years had struck. I crept from the window, by which I had entered, to the door, and turned the key, praying that the noise might not awake him. It did not.

"I crept back to the bedside, raised my knife on high, shouted '*My Father*,' thrust his big head over to one side and, as I had done a thousand times in the course of my training, drove the knife home to the very hilt —and even as, in the one motion, my left hand turned his head and my right hand stabbed, I knew that I had struck a stark, rigid corpse! . . . He was dead and cold! . . . I laughed aloud." . . .

Jean Rien laughed aloud and died.

XIII

SERMONS IN STONES

IT was a truly terrible night, and, to add to his own troubles and sufferings, John Bull had a great and growing anxiety as to the state of his beloved comrade, the Bucking Bronco. For that gentleman was undoubtedly working up for a "go" of *le cafard*, the desert madness of the Legion that so often ends in suicide, murder, or some military "crime," the punishment for which may be death, or the worse-than-death of the Zephyrs.

So awful was the heat of the barrack-room, and so charged was the atmosphere with electricity and human passion and misery, that even 'Erb had succumbed, and, in a fit of rage, akin to sheer madness, had dashed his beloved mouth-organ upon the ground and stamped it shapeless, his face contorted with demoniac rage. Thereafter, he set himself to tease and enrage the big American whose mind was as much slower, as his soul and body

were greater, than those of the little Cockney.

As he leant across Reginald Rupert's bed to reach his sack of cleaning-rags, John Bull whispered to that legionary, "The Bronco'll run amuck to-night if we don't watch it. He has already said he's going 'on pump' and also that he's going to 'lean agin the Sergeant-Major till he moults'! If 'Erb 'gits his goat,' he'll kill him, and then shoot himself."

"Spin a yarn, Bull," advised Rupert. . . . "If 'Erb gets impossible, I'll knock him out and we'll put him to bed. I'm with you, Old Thing."

Before the old soldier could reply, a loud crash caused him to spring round. The Bucking Bronco had flung his rifle against the white-washed wall.

"The Devil admire me if ever I clean that gosh-dinged, dod-gasted gas-pipe again," he growled, and added, "Yep! An' if any yaller-dog hobo of a *Caporal* gits fresh with me, I'll wipe his derned dial with it!"

"*You* know Seven Dials, Buck?" queried 'Erb innocently.

"Yep," was the reply.

"Then stuff four of 'em up yer shirt. Yah!" jeered 'Erb.

"You ain't offended, matey, are yer?" he added, in a tone of contrite concern.

"Nope," said the American, staring hard.

"Then stuff up the remainin' three!" yelped his tormentor, and laughed insultingly.

The huge American rose to his feet menacingly, but as Rupert stepped between him and 'Erb, he sat down again.

"Wot I complains of is that all the Seven Dials rolled inter one wouldn't make anything as ugly as *your* dial," he grumbled. "Why don' youse take it to a dime-show mooseum? It's like them faces them Chinese guys paints on their shields to terrify their enner-mies. Why should you be allowed to bring it into this shack an' spile my slumbers? It makes me tired, an' I feel it's my painful dooty to change it some." . . .

"'Streuth!" shrilled 'Erb. "'Ark at 'im! An' 'im on'y alive becos 'e ain't never see 'isself in a lookin'-glass! 'Ere, fetch a mirror, somebody, and let 'im commit sooicide wiv a single squint in it—if it don't break afore 'e can realize the orful troof." . . .

"Shut up, 'Erb," interrupted John Bull. "You fellows must help me, I want to talk. If I don't, I shall get *cafard*—and do some-

thing that'll put me in the Sergeant-Major's hands. I'm going to spin a yarn. . . . What's the most remarkable thing you've ever seen, 'Erb?"

"The Buckin' Bronco's silly faice, Farver," replied that gentleman.

The Bucking Bronco rose and began removing his shirt as if for battle.

'Erb reached for his bayonet.

Precisely how most *cafard* tragedies begin.

Rupert passed him a rag.

"It does want a bit of a polish," he said.

"That's right, Buck, you'll be cooler without that," remarked John Bull, and added:

"Look here, I'm going to clean your rifle to-night—and you can do mine to-morrow night."

"Please yerself, Johnnie," was the reply, "I'm done with chores in this outfit. I'm going to strip stark, and then I'm agoin' to march to Sidi-bel-Abbès—soon as I twisted ole Suicide-Maker's head 'round three times and catch who you can.' His body remains at attention facin' front while his head goes round —see? . . . Guess I'm *locoed* to-night. Anyhaow, I'm gwine to strip naked and go 'on pump' and see Carmelita." (Carmelita was six hundred miles to the north.)

"Well, put a turban on yer 'ead, fer modesty's saike, if you're a callin' on lidies," sneered 'Erb.

"What's the most remarkable thing *you've* ever seen, Bull?" asked Rupert, taking his cue. "That night when it was a case of pearls or impalement must have been about your most exciting time, what?"

"You never tole us nothin' abaht that, Farver. Wot was it?" inquired 'Erb, rising to the fly.

"Oh—rather a queer night I once spent," replied John Bull, "but it wasn't the queerest experience I ever had."

"Well, wot was the rummiest start you ever seen, then?" pursued 'Erb.

"Oh, just some stones—and what they did," was the reply.

"Git busy at 'em both, Johnnie, the pearls *an'* the other stones," said the Bucking Bronco, and added, "It looks like hell, you cleanin' my gun. Push it here."

Only too glad to see his friend employed, the old Legionary handed the rifle and rag to him and gave him a cigarette.

"There isn't much to the pearl yarn," he said. "It was before you joined, Buck. We were doing some unpeaceful penetration down

south, and I was laid out in an Arab charge. They rode right through us, and I got a kick on the head that put me to sleep for hours. When I sat up, the Arabs were looting the dead and killing the wounded—who hadn't already killed themselves. I suppose I was the only one not too badly wounded to be of any use for affording sport under torture. Anyhow I was the only man marched off to the *douar* —a very large one indeed, being that of the Sheikh Abou Moustapha ben Isa Bahr-el-Mandeb, the great Arab guerilla leader—and by the time I got there, I was as glad to see the place as if it had been my home. A *mehari* camel goes at a good pace—and I wasn't on its back."

"Dragged?" queried 'Erb.

"Well, I ran as long as I could, of course, but the sand was very loose and fine. When we stopped, and everybody who wanted a whack at me had finished, I was tied to a palm-tree, and a negro gentleman with a long gun, a sword, three daggers and a flint-lock pistol, was set to see I didn't get into mischief. In the evening a gang of them came and untied me and led me into the *douar* of low black tents. I thought I was 'for it' then, and could not keep my mind off the barrack-

room photos of mutilated Legionaries. They took me to Sheikh Abou, however, where he sat on a carpet in front of his tent, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes like a Christian. He was a fine-looking old bird, and spoke very fair French.

"'Bon soir, chien,' says he.

"'Bon soir, chat,' says I.

"'Pourquoi "*chat*"?' says he.

"'Parce que,' says I.

"I also explained that the French dog hunts the Arab cat, but he scored with a quiet smile and the remark that it rather looked as though the alleged cat was going to hunt the dog of an Unbeliever. My attempt at driving him into a rage and earning a swift death failed altogether. He was too big a man really, too balanced, too scholarly, too philosophic, for petty rages and quick stabs.

"'Are you unwounded, dog?' he asked.

"'By the weapons of soldiers,' I replied. 'Only bruised by the *matracks* of brave Arab gentlemen who strike manacled prisoners of war.'

"'What do the Franzawi do to Arab prisoners?' he returned.

"'They don't bind them and beat them,' I said.

"'What do they do to Arab women?' was his next question.

"'What did they do to your daughter?' I asked in turn. I knew that she had been sent straight to him, with a courteous letter, as soon as our general knew who she was.

"'True,' owned the Sheikh. 'See here, dog. My son, the bravest and handsomest man who ever sat a horse, was shot in cold blood by you Franzawi. My daughter was treated as a princess—which she is—and sent safely back to me. At dawn to-morrow, I shall either avenge the death of my son or else reward the kindness to my daughter.'

"He then gave orders to some of the gang, and they cut down a young palm that grew in front of his tent, leaving a stump a couple of feet high. This they trimmed with axes and knives to a point like that of a spear.

"While they were doing this, he went into his tent and came out again with a tiny bag of soft leather. Out of this he tipped some very decent pearls on to the carpet in front of him.

"'See these pearls,' said he. 'In the morning you shall have them as well as a camel and a guide to take you to your camp, *if* I find that gratitude for my daughter's safety

is stronger than the desire to avenge my son's murder. Should this not be the case, however, you will be impaled upon that stump like a date on a dagger, and with your face to the sun—after your eyelids have been removed. Go and ponder Life, Death, Kismet, the Goodness of Allah—and the relative values of Pearls and Impalement. After all—wealth is a snare and a delusion whilst Death may be annihilation and peace—even for a dog of a *giaour*.'

"'Which do you think it will be—pearls or death, Sheikh?' I asked.

"'*Mektoub rebib! Inshallah!*[1] . . . I positively do not know. *Barca!*'[2] replied the old gentleman—and I was taken back to my tree and given a gourd of water and a few dates.

"I had a merry night, I assure you! I wasn't to die then, however, for, towards dawn, the negro fell asleep, and as they had left me unbound, after giving me the food and water, I grabbed his bag of dates and grain, and did the record long-distance run of my life, most of it over that stony out-crop that takes no footprints. I put in the day in a cave, ran all the next night, and next day reached Sefraïna—an outpost of ours."

[1] It is written! As God wills! [2] Enough.

"'Streuth!" murmured 'Erb, "an' *that* wasn't your rummiest go, Farver? You seen some queer things, you 'ave, since you bin a Legendary!"

"No, the most truly extraordinary thing that ever happened to me took place before I joined the Legion. It was in India."

"What about them stones, John?" queried the Bucking Bronco, wiping his streaming brow with the rag that he had just used for cleaning his rifle.

"That's what I'm going to tell you about," was the reply.

"I was a youngster then, and I had got leave from my ship to go and see my brother who was commanding—who was—er—up country. We were lying in Bombay harbour and going into dock for some repairs or other. It took me a couple of days to get to where my brother was stationed—up in some very hilly country. As my train dropped down a steep incline into the place where I was to get out, I noticed that a branch line ran off to the left and climbed the side of a very steep rock and there ended abruptly. I asked my brother what this was, and he told me that sometimes a truck or two would break away at the end of a climbing train and come rush-

ing down the incline, which was many miles in length. As it approached the station it could be switched off on to this steeply rising branch line and expend its momentum in running up it, instead of dashing into the first train it met on the main line. And thereby hung a quaint and interesting tale. Some months before my visit, a naked Holy Man had rolled up, with his hair plastered with mud and tow, his body smeared all over with ashes, and his soul too lofty and enlightened to let his gross body do a job of work of any sort. He staked out a claim under this great rock near the line, planted himself in the middle of the patch of hand-patted dirt that was to be his home, and there squatted all day long, with his begging-bowl and an ugly-looking steel spike. The neighbouring villagers fed him of course, and, like wise men, propitiated him in every way and gave him anything he wanted —for, judging by his filthiness, nakedness, and laziness, he must be a very holy man indeed, must have acquired great merit, and be very potent to upset the apple-cart of anyone who thwarted him. Also he worked divers miracles, and caused a brazen image of Kali to arise from the earth at his feet. This he put in a circle of red-painted stones—and straightway

there was a sacred shrine and the foundations of a great place of pilgrimage and the site of a holy temple.

"But when June drew near, the villagers warned the Holy Man that the rains would break soon and he'd get uncommon damp when it rained. The holy one replied that he would build him a hut perchance.

"The villagers smiled, and said it rained three inches a day for months on end in those parts, when the monsoon broke. 'My hut shall be of stone,' said His Holiness.

"The villagers laughed outright. Where was there stone enough to make a grindstone, let alone a house, in those grassy jungle parts?

"'Stone for my house shall fall at my feet from heaven,' said the holy one. Whereat the villagers stared in round-eyed wonder. His Holiness was going it! Wasn't he biting off a bit more than he could chew? This was a plain issue and no blooming oracle-mongering about it. Either stone would fall or it would not—and the probabilities were strongly in favour of the *not*. Still he had done some good hefty miracles, some of which might not have been bunkum. '*Nous verrons!*' said the headman, in his own vernacular.

"And, a week before the rains broke, a truck or two laden with cut stone broke away from a train, careered gaily down the long incline, were duly switched off on to the safety-siding, and, being unusually heavy and swift, ran clean over the end and shot a truck-load or two of dressed stone at the feet of the Holy Man!

"'*Voilà!*' (or the equivalent thereof) said he to the villagers, and smiled patronizingly. You bet they turned to and built His Holiness as eligible a family residence as Holy Man could desire, and with the remainder of the stones they built him a nice stone platform to squat on in the sun, and think his great thoughts.

"I know this is all true, because my brother was told of His Holiness's daring prophecy long before the stones were safely delivered. When I heard the story from him, of course I must needs ride over and have a look at this local lion.

"I arrived at a moment of domestic crisis apparently, for from the hut of this celibate saint came the screams of a woman and the sounds of a real handsome hiding. Being young and foolish, I concluded that the lowing lady was getting the handsome hiding and that I had better take a hand. I barged in and found I was right. His reverence

dropped the stick and picked up his spear-headed staff, but I gave him a soother on the point of the chin and cleared out, preceded by the lady, who sprinted like a hare.

"I rode off rather pleased with my silly young self, and half an hour later was crossing a perfectly level stretch of grass, when suddenly, just as I bent to dismount to tighten my girth, a great stone missed my head by a hair's-breadth and struck the ground with a mighty nasty thud. The fraction of a second earlier, it would have got me. I stared at it in amazement, and looked all round. There wasn't another stone for miles, nor, except for a clump of feathery bamboos, a tree, nor a building, a wall, a hollow, nor a fold in the ground where anyone could be hiding. Absolutely nothing but level grass and a clump of bamboos that could not conceal a small monkey—much less a man.

"I was too astounded to move for a minute or two. Then I rode round and round in widening circles, quartering the ground until I had established, beyond all doubt, the fact that whoever threw the stone had thrown it at least four hundred yards—and the man never lived who could have thrown it forty.

"I went back and examined it—and re-

alized, with no added comfort, that it was a stone from my holy friend's house or platform! I remounted my horse—who was trembling and sweating as though he could see a tiger—and started to ride back. If *that* was his game! . . . And as I bent my head to light the cigarette I badly needed, another stone grazed my *topi*. Like the first, it hit the turf with a thud that was sickening to hear. Then I was frightened, I admit, as well as enraged. Again I circled round, this time galloping hard in a frenzy of anger and fear. If either of those stones had hit me, I should have been killed—and there wasn't a sign of a human being nor of a place where one could have hidden! And a blight seemed to have come over the day, chilling my very soul, and making me feel as though I were a child in a nightmare.

"I *knew* there would be another, and that the third one would not miss me. I shall never forget the feeling of utter helplessness, wrath, and terror that possessed me. What could I do? There *was* nothing to do, and at any moment the blow might fall—literally a bolt from the blue. And then I pulled myself together, thought of my fellow midshipmen, and imagined the eyes of the whole of my ship's company to be upon me.

"Tactics for ever! Dismounting and unbuckling the girth, I took off my saddle and, holding the end of the girth in my hand, pulled the big heavy saddle up and put it on my head and neck. Retaining it there with one hand, I set spurs to my horse, and rode hell-for-leather.

"And that's all I know about it—until I came to my senses and found myself lying in bed in my brother's bungalow!

"They told me the horse had come home riderless and unsaddled—and they at once concluded I had come a cropper, as I had remarked, on starting, that it was 'so long since I had seen a horse that I hardly knew the stem from the stern, nor how to sit amidships and hold the rudder lines.'

"My brother had ridden out and found me lying unconscious.

"'You must have taken a frightful toss,' he said, 'but how the deuce did you come to get the saddle smashed? How did it come to be off the horse? It looked as though some one had hit it with a huge sledge-hammer.'

"'Or a stone,' said I.

"'Yes,' said he. 'Why a stone?'

"I told him exactly what had happened, and he laughed.

" ' Falling on your head has made you dream dreams and see visions,' said he. He did *not* laugh a fortnight later when he and I went over the ground and found the three stones —in that stoneless place. When we went on, to call on the Holy Man, we learned that the gentleman had gone for a walk—to Benares, a thousand miles away." . . .

" Strike me pecooliar ! " murmured the Bucking Bronco. " That tale made outer whole cloth, John ? "

" It's every word of it true," was the reply.

" Well, you go to bed, Sonny ; yore pore brain's about biled I allow," counselled the American ; and, exchanging a glance with Rupert, the old Legionary allowed himself to be helped on to his cot and soothed.

" We'll fan pore ole Farver wiv a noospaper till he goes ter sleep," said 'Erb, getting an old *Echo d'Oran* from his shelf. " He's fair off 'is ole napper to-night."

And when the eyes of Jean Boule closed, apparently in slumber, the others silently sought their respective red-hot beds.

XIV

MOONSHINE

LA CIGALE, the Mad "Grasshopper" of the VIIth Company, was solemnly dancing by the light of the moon. He was a fine soldier and a hopeless lunatic, and had once been a Belgian Officer (Corps of Guides, the most aristocratic in the Belgian Army) and military attaché at various Embassies. No one knew his story, not even le Légionnaire Jean Boule, whom he loved and who, through great suffering, had attained great understanding and sympathy.[1]

This same gentleman, accompanied by the Bucking Bronco, Reginald Rupert, and 'Erb, was even now looking for him, knowing that he was always worse at the period of full moon and apt to do strange things.

They found him—solemnly dancing by the light of the moon—on a patch of green turf by the palms of the oasis.

[1] *Vide* "The Wages of Virtue." John Murray.

"Doin' a bloomin' fandango on the light fantastic toe—all on 'is little own!" observed 'Erb.

"Funny how the moon affects madmen," said Rupert.

"Yes," agreed John Bull. "Ancient idea too. *Luna* the moon, *luna*tic. Evidently some connection."

"Shall we butt in an' put the kibosh on it?" asked the Bucking Bronco.

"No," replied John Bull. "Let's settle down and have a smoke. We'll see him to bed when he's tired of dancing. If he wearies himself out there'll be more chance of some sleep for us. . . . We can't leave him to himself to-night."

"Nope," agreed the Bucking Bronco. "Remember the night he went *loco* once and for all? When the grasshopper jumped into his *soupe*."

"Yes; but it wasn't the locust in his *gamelle* that was really the last straw. He'd have had permanent *cafard* from that day, anyhow. . . . Look!—he's stopped." . . .

The Grasshopper, hearing voices, had ceased his posturing, bowing, and dancing. Crouching low, he progressed toward the shadow of the palms by long leaps.

"Hullo, *mon ami*!" cried John Bull; "come and have a smoke."

"*She* always danced like that to the Chaste Huntress of the skies when she showed mortals her full face," said La Cigale, as he flung himself down by his friend.

"'Oo did?" queried 'Erb.

"Diane de Valheureux," was the reply. "That is why Delacroix killed her. That Delacroix of the artillery."

"I could onnerstand 'im killin' 'er if she *sung*, but I don' see wot 'e wanted to kill her for fer dancin'," observed 'Erb. "Too bloomin' pertickler, *I* calls it."

"He was jealous," replied La Cigale, as he pressed his thin hands over his forehead and smouldering eyes.

"Diane was born at the full of the moon out in the beautiful garden of her father's château. It was her mother's whim—a woman of fire and moonbeams and wild fancies and poesies herself: Pan's own daughter.

"And from the day she could walk, Diane must go out and dance in the light of the full moon.

"I loved Diane. Also did Delacroix. He was mad for love of her. I was sane for love of her, since my love showed me all Beauty

and Harmony and the utter worthlessness of the baubles that men strive for.

"She loved me—I think. If she did not, certainly she loved no one else. I understood, you see. And, on one evening, given by God, she let me dance with her in the forest while Diana smiled full-face from Heaven.

"And her parents gave her to Delacroix, who had great possessions and a soul that values great possessions at their untrue value. The soul of a pedlar—the base suspicious mind of a ferret.

"After she was married—and broken-hearted—she still had one joy. She could still dance with the fairies in a glade of the forest at full moon. She *could*, do I say? She could not do otherwise when Diana and Pan and the Old Gods called—this night-born elf of night, moonlight, and the open sky and earth. And, returning from her midnight dance with the fairies, by the light of the Harvest Moon, she found that the husband whom she had left snoring, sat glowering—awaiting her—his mind a seething cesspool of foul suspicions.

"He killed her—of course. Such things as Fairy Dianes *are* killed by such other things as Hog Delacroix. And my heart broke. As your fine poet says, I think:

'There came a mist and a blinding rain,
And life was never the same again.'

Never. Nor had I the satisfaction of dealing with Delacroix. The brave soul fled and disappeared."

"You'll cop 'im yet, Ciggy," interrupted 'Erb. "Cheer up, Ole Cock. We'll all lay fer 'im, an' do 'im in proper, one o' these dark nights."

"I have settled accounts with him, now, I thank you," continued La Cigale. "I suddenly came face to face with him on board the troopship *L'Orient* at Oran. It was when the Legion sent drafts to Tonkin, to fight the Black Flags.

"I was on sentry, and looking up, as a man came along the gangway, beheld the evil face of Delacroix!

"By the time I had recovered my wits, and realized that it was he in the flesh, and not his ghost, he had passed on and was swallowed up by the part of the ship devoted to officers.

"I saw no more of him until it was again my turn for sentry duty. By this time we were at Port Said, and as desertion was easy here—since a man had but to dive overboard and swim a few yards or even rush down a gangway when we were coaling—all sentries

were given ball-cartridge and strict orders to shoot any soldier attempting to leap overboard or make a burst for the coal-wharf and British soil. (Once ashore, he must not be touched, or there would be trouble with England—and he might, with impunity, stand on the quay and deride us.)

"It was not likely that any of the French regulars would desert—artillery, line, or *marsouins*—but there would have been but few of the Legion who would not have made the promenade ashore but for these precautions.

"And as I stood there—my loaded Lebel in my hands—who should approach the head of the gangway over which I stood sentry, but this Delacroix, this thing whose foul hands —the very hands there before my eyes—had choked the life out of my Diane!

"Should I blow out his vile brains, or should I give myself the joy unspeakable of plunging my bayonet into his carcase?

"Neither. Too brief a joy for me—too brief an agony for him.

"As he passed, I held my hand with an effort that made me pale.

"The third time I saw him was in the Indian Ocean as we headed south for our next stopping-place, Singapore.

" He was leaning on the rail of the officers' promenade-deck, smoking a cigar after his comfortable lunch. The deck was empty. I ran lightly up the companion from our troop-deck, polluted the promenade-deck with my presence, sprang at him, seized him from behind, flung him overboard, and sprang after him with a cry of '*Diane*'!

" I must watch him drown; I must shout that name in his ear as he died. I must be with him at the last, and my hands must be at the throat of the foul dog. Not mine to fling him overboard and be clapped in irons while they threw him life-belts, and then lowered boats!

" Swimming with powerful strokes to where he had struck the water, I waited till he came up, and then seized him by the throat and strove to choke the life out of him as he had done to Diane. He struck at me wildly, and I thrust his head again beneath the water. But, yes! with a shout of 'Diane!' I dragged him below and swam downward as deeply as I could go. With bursting lungs I swam upward again and gloated upon his purpling face, and then—down, down, down, down, once more. . . .

" When they dragged me into the boat, I

was senseless and he was dead. I had swum with him for nearly an hour.

"When I recovered on board the ship, I was the hero of the hour—the man who had sprung into the sea, without stopping to divest himself of so much as his boots, to save an Officer. . . .

"What am I saying? . . . I am sleepy. . . . Bon soir, mes amis," and the Grasshopper rose and retired toward the tents.

"*Some* story!" remarked the Bucking Bronco, as the four followed. "Wouldn't thet jar you! Sure it's the mos' interestin' an' wonderfullest yarn I heerd him tell yet. Ain't it, John?"

"M—m . . . yes. . . . It is the more interesting and wonderful," was the reply of John Bull, as he thoughtfully flicked the ash from the end of his cigarette, "by reason of the fact that I happen to know—that the Grasshopper cannot swim a stroke."

XV

THE COWARD OF THE LEGION

JEAN JACQUES DUBONNET had distinguished himself that day, and he lay on his bed that night and cried. His companion, old Jean Boule, in that little hut of sticks and banana-leaves, had just been congratulating him on the fact that he had almost certainly won himself the *croix de guerre* or the *médaille militaire* for his distinguished bravery. And he had burst into tears, his body shaken with great rending sobs.

John Bull was not only a gentleman ; he was a person of understanding and sympathy, and he had suffered enough, and seen enough of suffering, to feel neither surprise, disgust, nor contempt.

" God ! Oh, God ! I am a coward. I am a branded coward ! " blubbered the big man on the creaking bed of boughs and boxes.

Was this fever, reaction, drink, *le cafard*, or what ?

Certainly Dubonnet had played the man, and shown great physical courage that day against the Sakalaves, the brave Malagasy savages who have given Madame la République a good deal of trouble and annoyance, and filled many a shallow grave with the unconsidered carcases of *Marsouins* [1] and Légionnaires in the red soil of Madagascar. As the decimated Company had slowly fallen back from the ambush in the dense plantations of the lovely Boueni palms, Lieutenant Roberte had fallen, shot through the body by a plucky Sakalave who had deliberately rested his prehistoric musket on his thigh and discharged it at a dozen yards range, himself under heavy fire. With insulting howls of "*Taim-poory, taim-poory,*" half a dozen of the enemy had sprung at the fallen man, when Dubonnet, rushing from cover, had shot two in quick succession, bayoneted two others, kicked violently in the face a fifth, who stooped over the Lieutenant with a *coupe-coupe*, and then, swinging his Lebel by the butt, had put up so good a fight that he had driven the savages back and had then partly dragged and partly carried his officer with him, to where the Company could rally, re-form, and make their stand to await

[1] Colonial Infantry (Infanterie de la Marine).

reinforcements. Undeniably Dubonnet had risked his life to save that of his officer, and had fought with very great courage and determination or he could never have reached the rallying-place with an unconscious man, when so many of his comrades could not reach it at all.

Yet there he lay, weeping like a child, and calling upon his Maker to ease his guilty bosom of the burden it had borne so long—the knowledge that he was a "branded" coward.

It was terribly, cruelly hot in the tiny hut, and, to John Bull, who arose from his camp-bed of packing-case boards, it seemed even hotter outside, as he went to fetch the hollow bamboo water-"bottle" which hung from the tree under which the hut was built. Was it possible that the Madagascan moon gave out heat-rays of its own, or reflected those of the sun as it did the rays of light? It really seemed hotter in the moonlight than out of it. . . . Carrying the bamboo water-receptacle, a cylinder as tall as himself—really a pipe with one end sealed with gum, wax, or clay, when a joint of the stem does not serve the purpose—the Englishman passed in through the doorless doorway and delivered an ultimatum.

"Whatever may be the trouble, *mon ami*,

weeping will not help it. Enough! . . . Sit up and tell me all about it, or I'll wash you off that bed like the insect you're pretending to be. . . . Now then—a drink or a drenching?"

"Give me a drink for the love of God!" said Dubonnet, sitting up. "Absinthe, rum, cognac—anything," and he clutched at the breast of his canvas shirt as though he feared it might open and expose his breast.

"Yes. Good cold water," replied John Bull.

"Cold water!" mocked the other between sobs. "Cold Englishman! *Cold water!*" and he bowed his head on his knees and groaned and wept afresh.

The old soldier carefully poured water from the open end of the great pipe into a *gamelle*, and offered it to the other, who drank feverishly. "Are you wounded in the chest, there?" he asked.

This *cafard*, the madness that comes upon soldiers who eat out their hearts in the monotony of exile and wear out their stomachs and brains in the absinthe-shop, takes strange forms and reduces its victims to queer plights. How should le Légionnaire Jean Jacques Dubonnet, *Soldat première classe*, recommended for decoration for bravery in the field, be a coward?

"Oh, merciful God—help me to bear it. I am a Coward—a branded Coward!" wailed the huddled figure on the rickety, groaning bed.

"See here, comrade," said John Bull, overcoming a certain slight, but perceptible, repugnance, and placing an arm across the bowed and quivering shoulders, "I am no talker, as you are aware. If it would give you any relief to tell me all about it—rest assured that no word of it will ever be repeated by me. It may ease you. I may be able to help or comfort. Many Légionnaires, some on their deathbeds, have felt the better for telling me of their troubles. . . . But do not think I want to pry." . . .

Swiftly the wretched man turned, flung his arms about the Englishman's neck, and kissed him.

John Bull forbore to shudder. (Heavens! How different is the excellent French *poilu* from the British Tommy!) But if he could bring peace and the healing, soothing sense of confession, if not of anything approaching absolution, to this tortured soul, the night would have been well spent—better spent than in sleep, though he was very, very tired.

"I *will* tell you, *mon ami*, and will pray to you then to give me comfort or a bullet in the

temple. A little accident as you clean your rifle! *I* cannot do it. I *dare* not do it—and no bullet will touch me in battle—as you have seen to-day. I live to die, and am too big a coward to take my life. . . . I am a branded coward. . . . See! See!" and he tore open the breast of his shirt. At once he closed it again, and hugged himself.

"No, no! I will tell you first," he cried.

The madness of *le cafard*, no doubt. The man had only recently been drafted to the VIIth Company from the depôt, and had appeared a morose, surly, and unattractive person, friendless and undesirous of friends. Accident had made him the stable-companion of the Englishman in this little damp fever-stricken hell in the reeking corner of the Betsimisarake district, in which the remains of the Company were pinned. . . .

The deplorable and deploring Dubonnet thrust his grimy fists into his eyes and across the end of his amorphous nose, as, with a sniff which militated against the romantic effect of the declaration, he said, "I swear I loved her. I loved her madly. It was my unfortunate and uncontrollable love that caused the trouble in the first place. . . . But it was her fault too, mind you! Why couldn't she have *told*

me she had a husband, away at Lyons, finishing his military service—a husband whom she had not seen for six months, and whom she would not see for another six? . . . Too late the fool confessed it—a month before he was coming, and a couple of months before something else was coming! And he famous, as I learned too late, for having all the jealous hate of Hell in his heart, if she so much as looked at another man. He, a porter of the Halles, notorious for his quarrelsomeness and for his fearful strength and savage temper. She hated him nearly as much as she feared him—and me, me she loved to distraction. And I her. . . . Believe me, she was the loveliest flower-seller in Paris—with a foot and ankle, an eye, a figure, ravishing, I tell you . . . and he would break her neck when he saw how she was and stab me to the heart. *She* would never have told him it was I she loved, but those others would—for dozens knew that she was my *amie*, and many in my gang did not love me. I am not of those whom men love—but women, ah!—and there were jealous ones in our *ruelle* who would have gone far to see her beauty spoiled and my throat cut. . . . It was all her fault, I say! Did she not deceive me in hiding the fact that she had a husband? She

deceived us all. But when this *scélérat* should turn up from Lyons, and find her at her pitch or in the flower-market, would any of them have held their tongues? . . . Can you not see it? . . . The crowd at the door, the screams as he entered and dragged her out into the gutter by the hair, his foot on her throat . . . and, afterwards—his knife at my breast. . . . Would any of the gang have stood by me? No, they would have licked their chops and goaded him on . . . and, oh God, I am a *coward*. . . . I can fight when my blood is up and I have to struggle for my life. . . . I can fight as one of a regiment, a company, a crowd, all fighting side by side, each defending the other by fighting the common foe. . . . I can take my part in a mélée and I can do deeds then that I do not know I have done till afterwards. . . . I can fight when the tiger in me is aroused and has smelt blood —but I am a *coward* if I am alone. I, alone, dare not fight one man alone. . . . Were I being tracked alone through the jungle here by but one of the six men I attacked to-day, my knees would knock together and my legs would refuse to bear me up. I should flee if they would carry me, flee shrieking, but they would not bear me a hundred metres. They

would collapse, and I should lie shuddering with closed eyes, awaiting the blow. I can hunt—with the pack—but I cannot be hunted. No. When our band waylaid the greasy bourgeois as he lurched homeward from his restaurant in the Place Pigalle or his Montmartre cabaret, I was as good an *apache* as any in the gang, and struck my blow with the best; but if it was a case of a row with the *agents de police*, and we were being individually shadowed, my heart turned to water, and I lay in bed for days. In a fair fight between about equal numbers of anarchists and *apaches* on the one hand, and *messieurs les agents* on the other, if it came upon us suddenly as they raided our rookery, I could play a brave man's part in the rush for the street; but I cannot be the hunted one—I cannot fight alone with none on either side of me. Oh God, I am a coward," and the wretch again buried his face in his knees and wept and sobbed afresh.

A common, cowardly gutter-hooligan apparently; an *apache*, a Paris street-wolf, and, like all wolves, braver in the pack than when alone; but in John Bull's gaze there was more of pity than anything. Suppose he, John Bull, had been born in a foul corner of some filthy cellar beneath a Paris slum? Would he have been

so different? Was the *man* to blame, or the Fate that gave him the ancestry and environment that had made him precisely what he was?

"You will be called out before the battalion and decorated with the cross or the *médaille, mon ami,* for your heroism to-day. Put the past behind, and let your life re-date from the day the Colonel pins the decoration on your breast. Begin afresh. You will carry about with you always the visible sign and recognition that you are a hero—there on your breast, I say." . . .

With a shriek of "*What do I bear on my breast now?*" the ex-*apache* tore open his shirt and exposed two strips of strong linen sticking-plaster, each some ten inches long and two inches wide, that lay stuck horizontally across his broad chest.

What was this? Had he two ghastly gashes beneath the plaster? Had all that he had been saying been merely the delirium of a badly-wounded man? Seizing their ends, the *apache* tore them violently from his skin, and, by the light of the little lamp, John Bull saw, deeply branded, and most skilfully tattooed in the ineradicable burns, the following words (in French):

J. J. DUBONNET
LIAR AND COWARD

The Englishman recoiled in horror, and the other thought it was in contempt.

"Where are your fine phrases *now*?" he snarled, with concentrated bitterness. "'*You will carry about with you always the visible sign and recognition that you are a hero,*'" he mocked. "I do indeed! . . . Oh God, take it from me. Let me sleep and wake to find it gone, and I will become a monk and wear out my life in prayer," . . . and he threw himself face-downward on the bed and tore the covering of his straw pillow with his teeth.

"See, *mon ami*," said John Bull, "the *médaille* will be above that. It will be superimposed. It will bury that beneath it. Let it bury it for ever. That is of the past—the *médaille* is of to-day and the glorious future. That is man's revenge—the cruel punishment and vengeance of an injured brute. The *médaille* is man's reward—the glad recognition of those who admire courage." . . .

"It is not the husband's work," growled Dubonnet. "He never caught me. My own gang did that—my comrades—my *friends*! Think of their loathing and contempt, their

hatred and disgust, that they could do that to a man and leave him to live. Think of it! . . . And I dare not kill myself and meet *her*. I am a coward. I fear Death himself, and I fear her reproachful eyes still more. . . . I *am* a coward and I *am* a liar. I broke my faith and word and trust to her—and I feared the death that she welcomed because *I* was by her side to share it. She drank the poison in her glass, threw herself into my arms, and bade me drink mine and come with her to the Beyond, where no brutal, hated husband could drag her from me to his own loathed arms. . . . And I did not. I could not. She died in my arms with those great reproachful eyes on mine, and whispered, 'Come with me, my Beloved. I am afraid to go alone.' And when I would not, she cursed me and died. And I let her go alone—I, who had planned our double suicide, our glorious and romantic suicide in each other's arms—that we might not have to part, might not have to face her husband's wrath, might be together for all time, though it were in hell. . . . Before she drank, she blessed me. Before she died, she cursed me—and still I could not drink. . . . And now I have not the courage to go on living, and I have not the courage to take my life. . . . And they

are going to brand me as a hero, are they? . . . *That* on my coat and *this* beneath it!" and peals of hysterical laughter rang out on the still night.

"Yes—*that* on your coat," said the Englishman. "Does it count for nothing? Let the one balance the other. Put the past behind you and start afresh. . . . Can you bear pain? Physical pain, I mean?"

"Is not all my life a pain?—did I not have to bear the pain of being branded with a red-hot iron? What is physical pain compared with what I bear night and day—remorse, self-loathing, the fear of the discovery of *this* by my comrades? How much longer will it be before some prying swine sees these strips and refuses to believe they hide wounds—laughs at my tale of attempted suicide in a fit of *cafard* —*hara-kiri*—self-mutilation with a knife." . . .

"Because, if you can face the pain, we can obliterate that. We can remove the record of shame, and you can wear the record of courage and duty without fear of discovery of the . . ."

"*What* do you say?" cried Dubonnet, as the words penetrated his anguished and self-centred mind. "*What?* Remove it? *How* —in the name of God?"

"Burn it out as it was burnt in," was the cool reply. "I will do it for you if you ask me to. . . . The pain will be ghastly and the mark hideous—but it will *be* a mark and nothing else. Anyone seeing it will merely see that you have been severely burnt—and they'll be about right."

Dubonnet sat up.

"You could and would do that?" he said.

"Yes. I should make a flat piece of iron red-hot and lay it firmly across the writing. It would depend on you whether it were successful or not, and would be a good test of nerve and courage. Have it done—and make up your mind that cowardice and treachery were burnt out with the words. Then start life afresh and win another decoration." . . .

"There are anæsthetics," whimpered Dubonnet. "Chloroform." . . .

"Not for Legionaries in Madagascar," was the reply. "Unless you'd like to go to Médecin-Major Parme with your story and ask him to operate, to oblige a young friend?"

Dubonnet shivered, and then spat. "*Médecin-Major Parme!*" he growled.

"If you like to wait a few weeks or months or years, you may have the opportunity and the money to buy chloroform," continued the

Englishman, "or the means for making local injections of cocaine or something; but I suggest you make a kind of sacrament of the business—have the damnable thing burnt out precisely as it was burnt in, and as you clench your teeth on the bullet in manly silence and soldierly stoicism, realize it is *the past* that is being burnt also, and that the good fire is burning out all that makes you hate yourself and hate life. Let it be symbolic."

John Bull knew his man. He had met his type before. Too much imagination; too little ballast; the material for a first-class devil, or a first-class man; swayed and governed by his symbols, shibboleths, and prejudices; the slave and victim of an *idée fixe*. . . . If he could get him to undergo this ordeal, he would emerge from it a new man—a saved man. An anæsthetic would spoil the whole moral effect. If he would face the torture and bear it, he would regard himself as a brave man, just as surely as he now regarded himself as a coward. He would recover his self-respect, and he would *be* brave because he believed himself to be brave. It would literally be his regeneration and salvation.

"It would hurt no more in the undoing than it did in the doing," he continued.

The poor wretch shuddered.

"She had written a few words of farewell to one or two," he said, "and told how we were going to die together, and when and where. . . . Her mother and some others burst in and found me with her body in my arms and my untasted poison beside me. . . . I went mad. I raved. I denounced myself. A vile woman who had once loved me, jeered at me and bade me drink my share and rid the world of myself. . . . I could not. . . . My own gang bound me on my bed, and one of them brought an old chisel and the half of an iron pipe split lengthways. With the straight edge and the semicircular one, they did their work. I was their prisoner for—ah! *how* long? And then they tattooed the scars—not satisfied with their handiwork as it was. . . . Before her husband found me I had fled to the shelter of the Legion. . . . I told the surgeon at Fort St. Jean that it was done by a rival gang because I had pretended to join them and did not. He gave me a roll of the sticking-plaster and advised me, for my comfort, to hide my '*endossement*' as he brutally called it." . . .

"Well, now get rid of it," interrupted John Bull. "The flat iron clamp, binding the corners of that packing-case, would be the very

thing. You are *not* a coward. You proved that to-day. Prove it more highly to-night, and, when they decorate you, let there be a still more honourable decoration beneath—the scars of a great victory. . . . Come on." . . .

When old Jean Jacques Dubonnet fell, many years later, at Verdun, the Colonel of his battalion, on hearing the news, remarked, "I have lost my bravest soldier."

The marks of a terrible burn on his chest were almost obliterated by German bullets and bayonets.

XVI

MAHDEV RAO

THE Legion's net is as wide as its meshes are close; and some rare, as well as queer, fish find their way into it.

Possibly the rarest that it ever contained was a Mahratta soldier who, during the Great War, found his way, always toward the rising sun, across a hundred miles of African jungle, until he reached the sea, and there, boarding a *dhow* at night, was carried across hundreds of miles of ocean.

The crew of the *dhow* was an interesting one, among its members being two French gentlemen, one an Intelligence Officer and the other a kindly priest, formerly of Goa—neither of whom was in anywise distinguishable from his sea-faring Arab colleagues.

The *dhow*, of a humble, unobtrusive and diffident disposition, had business at a lone coastal outpost where flies the *Tricouleur*, and

where sins and suffers a small garrison, of Colonial Infantry and of the Legion. . . .

Here the said priest, whose fairish knowledge of the Marathi tongue had enabled him to understand something of the soldier's story, was glad to assist him to attain his highest ambition—to fight against his personal and national enemies, once more.

As a trained soldier and a stout fellow, he found favour in the sight of the Commandant of the post, was duly enrolled as a soldier of France, and eventually found himself precisely where he desired to be. . . .

. . . . .

Mahdev Rao Ramrao, son of Ramrao Krishnaji, was born in a little mud-walled village that nestles above its rice-fields on the slope of the Western Ghats, in the Deccan of India.

High up above the village, its outline clear-cut against the sky, was the fort, "*Den of the Tiger*," from which Mahdev Rao's forbears, led by Shivaji the Great, had swept down to harry the plains, to plunder towns, and to fight the invading Mussulman. . . .

As he toddled about the crooked streets of tiny mud-built Nagaum, clutching the finger of his grandfather, Krishnaji Arjun, the little fat Mahdev Rao, clad in an embroidered velvet

cap and a necklace, learned that he was a Pukka Bahadur, a mighty one, the son, grandson, great-grandson, and general descendant of soldiers, fierce fighting men—from the days of Shivaji the Great, three hundred years ago, to the days of Wellesley Sahib (who had fought in those very parts), Nicholson Sahib, Outram Sahib (whose Orderly, grandfather's own father had been), Havelock Sahib, Roberts Sahib, even unto the days of the Great Lat-Sahib Kitchener, the Elephant of War, whose shadow had destroyed the *Hubshis*[1] and their prophet the Mahdi. . . .

And, as he grew up, Mahdev Rao understood that he was a *Kshattria*, of the caste next to the Brahmins themselves; that he was a cradle-ordained soldier, and that he had traditions to reverence and maintain. So he developed into a fine proud youth, self-respecting, ambitious, and religious beyond the conception of the vast majority of Europeans.

In due course, the day came when, as his father, his grandfather, and his great-grandfather had done, he sallied forth from Nagaum, and tramped to the recruiting-depôt at Belara to take service under the Sahibs as a Sepoy—to serve the King Emperor as his father and

[1] "Woolly ones" (negroes).

grandfather had served the Queen, and his other ancestors had served John Company or their own Rajah in due season. His intention was to be faithful to his salt; his ambition was to rise to be a Havildar, possibly a Jemadar, and conceivably a Subedar; his hope was to return to Nagaum full of honours, with medals and a pension, and to superintend the cultivation of the family plot of land (theirs since the days of Shivaji, the Scourge of the Deccan) and the upbringing of his sons and grandsons. . . . But Fate willed otherwise, and affairs in Nagaum were affected by the fact that an egotistical megalomaniac was making a God in his own image, seven thousand miles away in Berlin. . . .

. . . . . .

As a white-clad recruit at Belara, life went very well for Mahdev Rao the Mahratta, and when he found himself a khaki-clad full private of the Old Hundredth Bombay Rifles, he found himself indeed.

He was that happy man, the man whose day is full of work that is his hobby, work that he loves, work that is his play. The Jemadar of his double-company was an old friend of his father, and his own Havildar was a Nagaum man. Him, Mahdev Rao cultivated with such words and gifts as are fitting

—and highly politic. The Captain Sahib of his double-company was a *pukka* Sahib, a great *shikari*, horseman, athlete and soldier. The descendant of Pindaris could understand and admire the descendant of Norman free-booters and Elizabethan gentlemen-adventurers and soldiers of fortune. The Colonel Sahib, with his nine medal-ribbons, white moustache, and burning eye, was Mahdev Rao's idea and ideal of a Man. At an age when Mahdev Rao's people were getting a little senile and more than a little shaky, he seemed as young and active as a Mahdev himself—yea, though as old as Mahdev's grandfather. Sepoys who had seen him at work on the Frontier, when the Ghazis charged home like wounded tigers, spoke of him with bated breath. This was a Bahadur of Bahadurs, a *Man*. Oh, to die in battle under his approving eye! What bliss! . . . The Adjutant Sahib, Mahdev disliked and feared, though he respected him. (It seems the painful duty of a good Adjutant to make himself disliked and feared, as it is his gratifying privilege to be respected.) . . .

And, by the time war broke out, in August, 1914, the Regiment was Mahdev Rao's happy home; the Colonel Sahib was, in his own

expressive phrase, " his Father and his Mother," and his Mahratta comrades were his brothers.

Incidentally and severally, his *guru*, his Captain, Lieutenant, Subedar, Jemadar and Havildar were also his Father and his Mother ; and the honour of his Regiment was the honour of Mahdev Rao. Even the Punjabi Mahommedans and Pathans of the other double-companies were worthy souls, inasmuch as they were part of the Regiment ; and still more so the Sikhs, Rajputs, and Dogras ; but, of course, the very salt of the Regiment, which was the salt of the Army, which was the salt of the Earth, was Mahdev Rao's double-company of Deccani Mahrattas.

When it was known, a few months later, that the Regiment was to go on Active Service, Mahdev Rao's cup of happiness was already full, by reason of the fact that he had that very day defeated Pandurang Bagu and became champion wrestler of the Regiment—a distinction which guarantees that its holder would give a little trouble to any wrestler in the world, be his nationality and eminence what it might. . . . Judge of the swamping, seething overflow of the said cup of happiness when the news came, plain and indubitable, through the regimental *babu*, that the Old

Hundredth Bombay Rifles were to proceed forthwith to the city of Bombay and embark for East Africa!

Here was news indeed! News of increased saving from pay, decreased expenses, a certain medal, the chances of decoration and promotion; and adventure, experience, change. . . . Of course, to cross the Black Water was to lose caste, but the *guru* and the village priests would soon put that right and provide dispensation at not too exorbitant rates. Marvellous fellows, the Brahmins, at wangling a thing when there was money in it. . . .

. . . . . .

The ten days' journey from Bombay to Mombasa was very wonderful to Mahdev Rao, who had scarcely seen the sea before, and had never set foot on a ship or boat of any description. . . . The problem of how it propelled itself without sails or wheels puzzled him exceedingly, and still more so the problem of how it found its way, day after day, night after night, from one spot on the coast of India to another spot on the coast of Africa. And not just any old spot, mark you, but a definite given place at which it would arrive at a stated time. Certainly the Sahibs up on the bridge could not see across the space of

a ten days' journey with the most powerful of field-glasses. . . .

It was a surprise to him to find that the shores of this new and strange continent were remarkably like those of India, and that the coconut groves of the Kilindini inlet, between the island of Mombasa and the mainland, might have come straight from Bombay . . . But then surprises came so thick and fast, that his mind, always more tenacious than acute, became dulled, and he ceased to be surprised at anything—even at the fact that he was expected to fight in jungle so dense that no human being could move through it, save along the foot-wide paths that wound and twisted from village to village or from ford to ford. But *how* was a man to fight in such country, and what was a double-company to do, accustomed as it was to attack in extended order, and taught never to fire a round until there was a visible enemy to fire at? How *could* it fight in single file, with an impenetrable wall of trees, creepers, bush and thorn on either side? . . .

The days between the debarkation at Mombasa and the occupation by his double-company of an advanced outpost (days of weary marching through jungle and swamp) passed like a

dream, and Mahdev Rao settled down to the routine of this new strange life in a swamp-jungle, and soon felt as though he had never known any other.

It was not a pleasant life, for it was monotonous, unhealthy, and dull, the heat was terrific, food was not all it might have been, fever and dysentery were rife and, in his own phrase, "air and water were bad."

But Mahdev Rao was too keen a soldier to grumble. One did not expect Active Service to be like a furlough-trip to one's home, nor to have the comforts and luxuries of Nagaum, Belara or Bombay, in this enemy's country —the loathsome swamp where lived the *Hubshis* under the rule of their *Germani* masters (a kind of White Men, he gathered, who were not Sahibs).

So he trudged along cheerily when his half of the little garrison went marching on a reconnaissance into the enemy's country; did his sentry-go smartly; sat watching with keen untiring eyes on the *machan* in the tree-top, when such was his duty; and scouted warily along the jungle tracks when sent out with a comrade to patrol to the next outpost. . . .

"That Mahdev Rao's a good lad," remarked Captain Delamere to Lieutenant Carr as they

sat in the grass-hut "Officers' Mess" of the outpost, one evening, and tried to masticate the tinned string and encaustic tiles, served out to them under the name of bully-beef and biscuit.

"Always merry and bright, and chucks a chest when some of the other blokes begin to slouch and lag a bit."

"Yes," agreed Carr; "he'll make a damgood Havildar some day. . . . Might make him a Lance-Naik now. . . . Hardly the brains to go further than Havildar, I am afraid . . . but we c'd do with a few thousand Mahdev Raos out here." . . .

"We'll give him a stripe," said Delamere, as he tried to cut up some black-cake ration-tobacco (horrible cheap poison), with the one and only table-knife.

"Why the devil can't they issue tobacco a man can smoke, if they're going to issue a tobacco-ration at all? . . ." he growled, and added: "Yes—we'll give Mahdev Rao a stripe." . . . But it was some one else, and a very different person, who gave Mahdev Rao his stripes.

For, on the following day, he and Pandurang Bagu, patrolling to meet the patrol from the next outpost, were ambushed.

There was a sudden burst of fire from a tree-top, as well as from the bush before and behind them, and Pandurang Bagu went down with a heavy bullet of soft lead in his shattered hip-joint. Almost simultaneously, Mahdev Rao was felled by the blow of a rifle-butt, as he raised his rifle to fire at big khaki-clad *Hubshis*, in tall khaki grenadier-caps, who rushed at him in front.

"Good!" grunted the Swahili sergeant in charge of the squad. "That one will be able to talk. Kill the other."

Seven bayonets were plunged into Pandurang Bagu as, with trembling hands, he raised his rifle. As one does not get the pleasure of plunging one's bayonet into an enemy every day, the Swahilis and Yaos made the most of their opportunity, and Pandurang Bagu's life ebbed quickly out through dozens of wounds. . . . The Sergeant was a happy man, and his ebon countenance was wreathed in smiles. He had been sent out, by the *Herr Offizier*, with orders to ambush a patrol and bring in at least one member of it alive—and he had succeeded to perfection.

One night's wait in a most admirable ambush; strict orders *not* to shoot the last man of the patrol—be there a dozen or be there but two—

and to spring out at each end of the ambush and capture the survivor alive; five seconds of smart work as per programme, and the job was done.

And done very neatly—for there are few braver or more skilful soldiers in the world than these African Rifles, when fighting in their own unique jungle. . . .

. . . . .

When Mahdev Rao recovered consciousness (which he did very quickly, thanks to his thick skull and thicker turban) he found himself a prisoner. His hands were bound behind his back, he was stripped almost naked, and his kit and accoutrements were being examined and looted by his captors.

He realized that he was bare-headed and that the long tuft of hair, left among the cropped stubble (that the gods might lift him into heaven, when his time came), was hanging down his back.

He ground his teeth at the shameful outrage these casteless sons of pariah-dogs had put upon him, in knocking his turban off and exposing his bare head. He rose to his knees and staggered to his feet, only to be knocked down again from behind.

"If you strike him senseless, you will have

to carry him, Achmet Ali," said the Sergeant. "He has to be in the *boma*[1] by to-morrow morning, alive and able to answer the questions of the *Bwana Macouba*."[2] . . .

"I am the hero who knocked him down first," said Achmet Ali, and straightway improvised a chant.

> "I am the hero,
> The swift-striking hero,
> I am the hero
> Who knocked him down first."

"Be also the hero that drives him along with a bayonet, then," interrupted the Sergeant, "and you'll be the hero whose head I will blow off if the dog escapes."

And, for the remainder of that day and all that night, the *askaris* drove Mahdev Rao (as the potter and *dhobi* of Nagaum drive their donkeys) with blows and curses.

Once, during one of the brief halts, food was offered him (cold boiled rice and a plantain), and he tried to give these foul Untouchables, these casteless carrion-scavengers, some faint idea of the unutterable pollution of the very thought of taking food from their defiling hands—the filthy *Hubshi* dogs! . . .

"He is too frightened to eat, poor heathen

[1] Enclosure; jungle fort [2] Great Master

Infidel dog," remarked the Sergeant to Achmet Ali, as he turned towards Mecca and prostrated himself in prayer. . . .

While fording a river, next morning, Mahdev Rao endeavoured to drown himself and the hero, to the boundless amusement of the rest of the squad. The hero revenged himself by making a pattern of cuts upon his captive's back with the point of his bayonet. But they were only about an inch long and quarter of an inch deep, and not likely to affect his value when questioned by the *Bwana Macouba* as to the number and disposition of the British forces.

. . . . .

The *Germani boma* was very similar to the one from which Mahdev Rao had come, but considerably larger. Dazed and starving as he was, he noted its strength, the height of its palisades, the depth of its trenches, the number of its machine-guns, and the strength of its garrison of native African Rifles (*askaris*) and *Germani* Europeans. He was surprised to see that the majority of the latter wore beards. . . . He had never before seen a European officer or soldier with a beard. . . . Obviously the *askaris* were well drilled and highly disciplined.

Also, everything about the place was well done. The huts were neater and stronger and better thatched than in his own *boma*, paths were more neatly made and kept, the earthworks were bigger and stronger. Evidently the *Germanis* had more coolie-labourers and got more work out of them, or else they gave more attention to these details. Certainly it was a very strong *boma*, and very strongly garrisoned. He had seen twelve machine-guns and two small quick-firers (something like Indian mountain-battery guns) already. He would have a lot to tell the Captain Sahib when he escaped and got back to the outpost. . . . But would they not take very especial care that he did not escape, after he had seen so much? . . . And how was he to find his way back to his Company through that dense blind jungle, if he did escape? . . . It had got to be done, anyhow—and then he could lead the Captain Sahib and the double-company to this place, and they could rush it at dawn, with much slaughter of black untouchable pariahs who kept a high-caste Indian bare-headed, offered him polluted food and water with their defiling hands, struck him, and generally behaved like the savages they were. . . .

Doubtless, however, their *Germani* masters

would punish them and do justice. Though not *pukka* Sahibs, they were White Men, and, as such, would have understanding and a sense of decency.

White Men do not offend against the religion of others; they understand caste and respect it; they know that prisoners of war are to be honourably treated. . . . Yes, they understand a high-caste man, and know the difference between a dog of a low-caste negro *askari* of Africa, and a high-caste *Kshattria* Sepoy of India; the difference between one who comes next to the Brahmins themselves and one who is utterly beyond the pale, a walking pollution to earth, air, and water, whose very shadow is a defilement and a desecration to what it falls upon. . . . Yes, it would be all right when he was brought face to face with their officers, even though they were *Germanis*. . . .

He was hustled into a filthy grass hut in which were four negroes—spies, defaulters and guides, the last being kept in bonds with the criminals, by reason of their incurable desire to leave the service of their employers and captors. . . .

Later he was haled forth—still bare-headed, bound, and half-naked—to where, beneath a tree, sat three Europeans, attended by a Ser-

geant and guard of *askaris*, and one or two nondescript persons, including a half-caste in European clothing, a clerk, and a servant. On a camp-table before the White Men were bottles of beer, glasses, a revolver, a heavy *kiboko*[1] of rhinoceros-hide, a map, and a note-book.

The central figure of the three (one Von Groener), who wore a khaki uniform, blue putties and a white-topped peaked cap, bade the half-caste ask the prisoner the name of his regiment, the number of men in his *boma*, and the number of machine-guns it contained—for a start.

The "half"-caste, a Negroid Goanese-Arab-Indian, put the questions in the barbarous Hindustani of the Goanese quarter of Dar-es-Salaam. Mahdev Rao, a Mahratta, always speaking Marathi in the Regiment, knew little more Hindustani than he did English.

"*Tera pultan ka nam kya hai?*" said the "interpreter." "*Kitni admi tera boma men hain? Kitni tup-tup tup-tup bandook hain?*"[2]

Madhev Rao had a fair idea as to what the

[1] Whip.

[2] "What is the name of your regiment? How many men are there in your outpost? How many machine-guns?"

man was driving at, but he looked stupid, and, in Marathi, replied :

" I do not understand."

Mr. Alonzo Gomez had never heard Marathi in his life.

" The man does not understand the language of India, *Herr Kommandant*," he said, in clumsy German, to the officer who sat in the centre.

" But that is absurd," replied that worthy. " If he comes from India he knows the language of India. Tell him I will *kiboko* the flesh from his bones if he tries to fool *me*."

" *Bwana Sahib tumko kiboko diega*,"[1] answered Gomez to the prisoner.

" I will try him in English," said the senior officer to the others. " The English give all drill-orders in English ; therefore this animal understands English."

" *Ja ! Ja !* " agreed the other two. " *Ganz klein wenig*."

" Hear, pig-dog," quoth the senior gentleman, " his battalion what his name calls ? How large are man-number of it ? How large are gun-machine-number of it ? Isn't it ? "

To Mahdev Rao, at least two of the gutturally pronounced words were familiar. " Sahib," he said in Marathi, " I am a Sepoy and a prisoner

[1] " The Master will flog you."

of war. I am not a spy. And I am very tired and thirsty." . . .

"The swine is contumacious," said the senior. "He understands both English and Hindustani. He is shamming. We will help him to find his wits—and his tongue," and he gave a curt order to the *askari* Sergeant. (Also to the Swahili servant—concerning the replenishment of the beer supply.) He was a handsome man of about forty, with a small forked beard, a cold blue eye, and a hard domineering expression. Once he had been an ornament of Berlin and Potsdam, an *Ober-Leutnant* of Grenadiers; but debt, drink, cards, and an unfortunate duel, had sent him into exile. In exile he had grown morose, bitter and savage, loathing and blaming everything and every one—except himself.

Of his companions, one was a ne'er-do-well relation of a German General and had been shipped to German East Africa to die of fever, beer, and dissipation; the other was an ex-*Feldwebel* of the Prussian Guard who had made money as an elephant-poacher and then done exceeding well as a trader and planter—well from the financial point of view *bien entendu*; from the moral point of view he had not done very well.

The three were not typical of their class, and were of wholly different fibre from their General (a great soldier and a gentleman).

They were three bad men, bad by the standards of the German colony—and the order that *Ober-Leutnant* von Groener had given, and that his colleagues had applauded, was that Mahdev Rao, prisoner of war, captured in uniform, upon his lawful occasions as a soldier, should be tied to a tree and flogged with the terrible rhinoceros-hide *kiboko* with which the German instils discipline into his native soldiers, servants, coolies, criminals, and lady "housekeepers."

Mahdev Rao was seized by the *askari* guard, and so tied that he was hugging, with arms and legs, the big tree beneath which the "court" was sitting.

In the hands of a huge, brawny, and most willing Sergeant of *askaris*, the five-foot *kiboko*, tapering from the thickness of a man's wrist to that of his little finger, supple as india-rubber, and tougher than anything in the world, is a most terrible instrument of torture and punishment. The "draw" of the scientific pulling-stroke (as of one who cuts through a stick with one slice of a knife) of the *kiboko*,

lacerates and mangles, blood leaping at every blow. . . .

By the time the three German gentlemen considered that Mahdev Rao was sufficiently exhorted, encouraged, and rebuked (for his contumaciousness), he was also senseless and apparently dead. . . . It was annoying, as the *Herr Ober-Leutnant* had hoped to obtain much interesting and useful information concerning the Indian Expeditionary Force, and to send it to Head-Quarters. . . .

Mahdev Rao recovered consciousness in the same prison-hut. He was alone, and the fact that there was no one present to see such a fall from grace, aided the terrible pangs of thirst in inducing him to drink from the gourd of water that stood in the corner. . . . Later, he ate a couple of plantains. . . . As they were covered by their skins, the interior had not been defiled—or, at any rate, one could take a certain amount of comfort from such a theory and argument.

Later still, he bowed to the inevitable, and ate the cold boiled rice his *askari* gaoler brought him. It was a terrible thing to do—but life was dear—and revenge was dearer. He would live, at any cost, to be revenged upon that —that—swine, and son of swine—that off-

spring of pariah curs—that carrion-eating lump of defilement and pollution—who had had him, *him*, Sepoy Mahdev Rao of the Old Hundredth Bombay Rifles, flogged, publicly flogged, by black beasts of *Hubshis*. . . .

Great as were his physical sufferings, his mental sufferings were a thousand times greater. His body felt pain: his mind felt agonizing tortures and excruciating torments unspeakable. . . . He ground his teeth, clenched his fists, and cried aloud in rage and horror—and then fell silent and still . . . for no—he must not go mad, he must not lose strength, he must not die—until he had had his revenge. . . .

Next day he was questioned again and flogged again. . . .

At the end of a week the *Ober-Leutnant* decided to send him to Head-Quarters at Mombobora. There was a Missionary Father in the town, who had worked in India and would know the language perfectly. There was also a hospital, where they would patch the dog up, that he might be able to converse with the Father. . . . Anyhow—since the Colonel seemed to think that he, the *Ober-Leutnant*, had shown little skill in his endeavours to get information from this Indian, let him see if he could do any better himself. . . .

At Head-Quarters they learnt nothing from Mahdev Rao, though he learnt much from them concerning the difference between German and British methods of dealing with native prisoners who will not " talk."

He was not flogged, but he was abused, starved, bound, insulted, and finally herded with a chain-gang of negro criminals, and set to such work as road-sweeping and latrine-cleaning.

What this means to a man of caste, no one who has not lived in India can guess, and no one but a high-caste Indian can know. Nothing worse can happen to him.

And, from time to time, he was brought before the Missionary, who talked to him in excellent Marathi, promising him all kinds of rewards if he would describe the composition and disposition of the Expeditionary Force from India. . . . Were there Pathans and Gurkhas in it? . . . Were there field-batteries? . . . Were there Pioneer Corps? . . . Had part of it gone by the Uganda Railway to Nairobi and the Lakes? . . . Were the Sepoys loyal? . . . If he returned to them with much money and more promises, would he be able to induce any of them to desert? . . . What was the state of feeling in India? . . . And much more, until

Mahdev Rao, maddened, sullen, brutalized, barely sane, by reason of his wrongs, cruelties, and immeasurable degradations, would lift up his voice and curse the *padre*, the evil white *fakir*, until his guards smote him on the mouth and dragged him away—a naked, filthy wreck of a man. . . .

Constantly he sought an opportunity of escape from the town, but found none.

He must have food, a weapon of some kind, and he must get more strength and recover his health, get rid of this fever, before he could take the opportunity if one offered. But when he was not road-sweeping or road-making with the chain-gang, he was otherwise working, always under the eye of an *askari* guard, who asked nothing better than an excuse to shoot him. . . .

No—he must wait, and it was always possible that the *Germani* officer, who had flogged him, might come to this Head-Quarters, and save Mahdev Rao the journey to that gentleman's *boma*.

For Mahdev Rao's one idea now, his one reason for living, was to avenge himself upon *Ober-Leutnant* von Groener—the man who, instead of treating him as a prisoner of war, had had him publicly flogged, and had then sent him to this place where a high-caste

Indian Sepoy was as a cannibal negro criminal, and was herded with them. . . . He did not wish to live. He did not wish to return to India—he was too eternally and utterly defiled, polluted, and out-caste for that. But he did not intend to die until he had met the *Germani* who had had him flogged, the man whom he regarded as the arch-type of his captors, the man who had brought him into this living death of defilement, the man who was the cause of all his woes. . . .

To listen seriously to the Missionary Father's temptations to treachery never occurred to him. He was Sepoy Mahdev Rao of the Old Hundredth Bombay Rifles, a soldier of the King Emperor, and son of a long line of brave and honest fighting men, "true to salt," and loyal as hilt to blade. . . .

. . . . .

One morning, with the rest of a road-sweeping gang, Mahdev Rao was working at a spot just outside the native "town" of Mombobora, where a little bridge crossed a muddy stream, more mud than stream, that lay between two tracts of cultivation. . . .

A squad of *askaris* tramped past . . . a doctor and two nurses . . . a small herd of cattle . . . a German lady in a kind of rickshaw . . . an

officer in a hammock slung from a stout bamboo pole, borne by four Kavarondo natives . . . a file of negresses with water-jars upon their heads . . . and then—did his eyes deceive him? —his Enemy, the man who had had him flogged!

. . . . . .

. . . Strolling along, taking the morning air, came *Ober-Leutnant* Fritz von Groener, who had been summoned to Mombobora by the Colonel, and had arrived on the previous day.

As he reached the little bridge, a crouching man, a filthy, half-naked wretch of the road-gang, suddenly rose and sprang at him, drove him sideways and backwards, before he could raise his heavy whip or draw his automatic—and seized him in a grip, scientific and powerful, the hold of a champion wrestler, in whom was the strength of madness and the lust of revenge.

Before the lounging *askari* guard heard a sound of the struggle, the two, swaying and straining, fell against the low coping of the bridge, toppled over it, and splashed heavily into the liquid mud beneath—the German officer beneath the Indian soldier, whose hands were at his throat, whose knee was on his chest, and who, slowly, strongly, surely, thrust his head beneath the foul slime, and held it

there as the writhing bodies sank and splashed in the watery mud. . . .

It is probable that the *Herr Ober-Leutnant* was dead before Askari Mustapha Moussa, in charge ot the road-gang, had realized that something was wrong, had reached the bridge-head and had made up what must be called his mind, that it was his duty to risk a shot at the "coolie."

Certainly he was dead enough when the hands of Mahdev Rao were at length torn from his throat, and the two were dragged from the mud into which they were disappearing. . . .

. . . . . .

Rumours of the approach of an enemy force caused much confusion that night, and Sepoy Mahdev Rao, sentenced to be shot at dawn, decided to view the dawn elsewhere than in Mombobora, or to die in an attempt to turn this confusion to good account. . . .

XVII

THE MERRY LIARS

A COMPETITION in lying was proceeding, and entries were good. (One Légionnaire told of his beloved pet rabbit which nibbled lead, ate cordite, swallowed a burning match—and then went out and shot its own, and its master's, supper.)

"Yep," growled the Bucking Bronco, as the little group of Legionaries, from all corners of the earth and all strata of human society, turned towards him, "I allow I can tell as big a lie as Ole Man Dobroffski—even if I *ain't* the Czar of Roosia's gran'pa's little gran'chile, Wilhelmine-Bungorfski-Poporf."

Père Jean Boule, "father" of the Second Battalion, and incidentally an English baronet, moved uneasily. The Bucking Bronco had always disliked the Russian aristocrat, and had never made any secret of the fact. If ever they fought, there would not be two survivors of that fight . . . and the Bucking Bronco was

his beloved and loving friend, and a mine of virtues, though a Bad Man—of the best sort. He had been, among other things, a miner, cowboy, tramp, lumberman, professional boxer, U.S.A. trooper, and ornament of a Wild West show, of which he was the trick revolver-shot.

" Ah . . . you allus was a purple liar, Buck," put in 'Erb, the Cockney, as the American produced a deplorable French pipe and some more deplorable French tobacco. (*How* his soul yearned for a corn-cob and some Golden Bar, or " the makings " and a bag of Bull Durham !)

" I give a guy a picky-back once," continued the Bucking Bronco, ignoring 'Erb, whom he usually treated as a mastiff treats a small cur.

" But how interesting ! " murmured the ex-Colonel of the Imperial Guard, who called himself " Dobroffski."

" And it killed that guy, and it killed his gal, and it sent me bug-house—*loco*—for Devil-knows-how-long-an'-all," continued the American, ignoring Dobroffski as he had ignored 'Erb.

" What is it that it is, then—this ' *bug-'ouse* ' and this ' *loco* ' ? " murmured le Légionnaire Alphonse Blanc, whose English included no American.

"Same as what you'd call 'dotty'—or 'off 'is onion'—'looney'—'balmy on the crumpet'—in yore silly lingo," explained 'Erb helpfully.

"*Fou*," murmured La Cigale, for the benefit of Blanc and Tant-de-Soif, whose knowledge of English was limited also. (La Cigale, the ex-Belgian officer, knew all there was to know about *démence*, poor soul.)

"Wot killed 'em? Was it the sight o' the faices you made—doin' the job o' work?" inquired 'Erb.

The Bucking Bronco leaned back against the wall of rough-hewn, thickly-mortared grey stones, spread his huge legs abroad, and blew a cloud of smoke. He was wearing his *capote* (the long blue great-coat) and red trousers tucked into black leggings, but he shivered as though cold.

"I can see that gal's face now," he said, staring out across the ocean of sand that surrounded the fort; and the enormous powerful man, with his long arms, big hands, leathern face, and heavy drooping moustache, looked ill and fell silent.

"Wish *I* could, Ole Cock," observed 'Erb. "Where's she 'iding?"

"And Bud Conklin's feet, too, a danglin'

just above me face. Ole Bud Conklin, what I'd bin a road-kid with, an' took the trail with ever-since-when—ranchin'; gold-prospectin', with a rusty pan and a bag o' flour; ridin' the blind, right across the States; lumberin'; throwin' our feet fer a two-bit poke-out, in the towns; and trampin' through the alkali sage bush, as thirsty as a bitch with nine pups.

"Bud Conklin was a blowed-in-the-glass White Man, an' I was the death of him. Yes, Sir. *And* his gal—a little peach, named Mame Texas. . . . I guess she begun life as 'Mame o' Texas,' never hevin' hed no parients—nawthen to speak of—'cos Dago Jake had lifted her outer Ole Pete Frisco's ranch when his gang shot th' ol' sinner up, down Texas way (an' *he* never hed no wife—nawthen to speak of) and burnt the place down.

"An' when she filled out and grow'd up a bit, Dago Jake he got that sot on the gal, he allowed as he'd give any man lead-pisenin' as looked at her twice; an' he beat her up every time he got a whisky-jag, so' she shouldn't look twice at nobody else.

"Marry her? No! There wasn't no sky-pilots around Hackberry Crossin' by the Frio River in them prickly-pear flats; an' Dago

Jake dassn't show his ugly face near no church-bearin' city—even if he'd held with matterimony as a pastime.

"Nope! Nix on marryin' fer Jake.

"Then me an' Bud eventuates in Hackberry Crossin', travellin' mighty modest and unconspishus, after arguin' with a disbelievin' roller of a Ranger as allowed we'd found our pinto hosses before no one hadn't lost 'em.

"An' it was up to us to lose ourselves an' keep away with both feet after we'd collected that cracker-jack's hoss, an' gun likewise, *and* the financial events in the pockets of his pants.

"He was a sure annoyed boob when me an' Bud told him good-bye an' set his erring feet fer Quatana—having took his belt and pant-suspenders and bootlaces so's he'd hev to hold his pants up with one hand an' his boots on with the other. An' then we burnt the trail for Hackberry Crossin', day an' night, and went to earth at Dago Jake's, sech being Jake's perfession.

"Bud didn' look at Mame twice. Nope, *once* was enuff, but it lasted all the time she was in sight! . . . Bud took it bad. . . . He wrote po'try. An' he made me listen to it while we wolfed our mornin' *frijoles* an

cawfy, or evenin' goat-mutton steaks an' canned termatoes, an' forty-rod whisky. Bud's fav'rite spasm begun :—

> "'*O Mame, which art not in reach,*
> *O Mame, thou art a peach!*
> *I fair must let a screech*
> *Or else my heart it will be too full for speech.*'

An' there was about twenty noo verses each day. He made 'em up outa his silly head while we lay doggo, up in the pear-thicket along the *arroyo* behint Jake's adobe.

"An' by the time the Sheriff, an' the Lootenant of Rangers, an' the Town Marshal o' Quatana begun to allow that no such suspicious characters as me an' Bud hadn't ever crossed the Frio at Hackberry Crossin', Bud was nearly as much in love with Mame as Mame was with Bud.

"They *hed* got it bad.

"And soon that low-lifer coyote of a Dago Jake, he begins to smell a rat, and afore long he smells a elephant. Bud wants to shoot him up, but Mame won't stand for it. She don't want Bud to swing fer a goshdinged tough like Jake. '*It would be man-slaughterin' murder,*' says she; '*besides which, Jake kin pull a gun as quick as greased lightnin'. Yew*

ain't got nawthen on Jake at that game,' she says, *'wherefore I holds it onlawful and calc'lated to cause a breach of the peace—and o' yew likewise, Bud,'* an' she kisses him like hell, we-all being in the pear-thicket, an' me lookin' the other way like I was searchin' fer me lost youth an' innercence. . . ."

"Wot abaht this 'ere picky-back, Buck?" interrupted 'Erb. "Thought you was agoin' to tell a thunderin' good lie abaht killing yer pal an' 'is donah, through playin' picky-backs with 'em."

Le Légionnaire Reginald Rupert, leaning forward from his place on the bench, smote 'Erb painfully in the ribs: William Jones crushed the little man's *képi* over his face: while La Cigale, in the voice of one who chides a dog, hissed "*Tais-toi, canaille!*" in an unwonted fit of anger at the unmannerly interruption.

"But what is it that it is, this peek-a-back?" whispered Alphonse Blanc to John Bull, as the Bucking Bronco turned his slow contemptuous regard upon 'Erb.

"As to say, *sur-le-dos*," replied the old Legionary, seizing the Cockney in a grip of iron as he prepared to deal faithfully with Rupert and Jones (who had been Captain

Geoffry Brabazon-Howard of the Black Lancers).

. . . . .

"And the end of it was," continued the American, "that we made our get-away, the three of us, one night; mighty clever, we thought, until we heard Dago Jake laugh—at our very first campin' ground! . . .

"I'd kep' first watch, an' then Bud the next—and Mame, she must sit up and keep watch with him. . . . 'Fore long they was doin' it with their four eyes shut, being as tired as a greaser's mule, and aleanin' agin a tree, wrop in each other's arms. . . .

"I ain't ablamin' 'em any. . . . *They* paid —most, anyhow. . . .

"When I wakes up, hearing Dago Jake's pleasin' smile, he'd got 'em covered with his gun, an' half-a-dozen of his gang (blowed-in-glass-Bad-Men-from-Texas they was, too) had got me covered also likewise.

"'*First on you as moves, and I let some daylight into the dark innards o' that respectable young female as yore acuddlin', Bud Conklin,*' says Jake. '*Git up and hands up.*'

"'*Do it smart, Buck,*' ses Bud, and we jumps up and puts our hands up, right there. I guess Bud hoped as how Jake might forgive

the gal an' take her back—when he'd done with Bud. . . .

"I'd hev reached for the hip-pocket o' me pants and pulled my gun—for I allow that no moss don't grow on me when I start in to deliver the goods with a gun—for all his bone-head bunch o' shave-tails, but I allowed Jake would shoot the gal up, all right; and that was where the outfit had got the bulge on us. . . . Yep, it was Jake's night to howl, . . .

"And right here's where the picky-back eventuates, Sonny," he added, addressing 'Erb.

"Yep. Mr. Fresh-Tough Coyote Dago Jake had thought out a neat cinch—cool as ice—with his black heart boilin' and bubblin' like pitch. . . . In about half no-time, me an' Bud was roped-up with raw-hide lariats—me like a trussed fowl and Bud with his hands only. They was bound fit to cut 'em off, but his legs was free—and all the time Dago Jake covers the gal, and asks in his dod-gasted greasy voice—like molasses gurglin' outer a bar'l (no, I didn't like Jake's voice)—whether she'd hev her ears shot off or be crippled fer life with a shot in each knee, if she stirred an inch, or me an' Bud tried to move hand or foot. . . . Yes, Sir, Jake fair gave me the fantods that bright an' shinin' morn.

"Then, when they'd done tyin' me an' Bud like parcels, they bound the gal to the tree what we'd been campin' under. They tied her hands behind her; they tied her feet an' knees together; and they tied her to that tree like windin' string round a bat-handle. . . . And then they puts a halter round Bud's neck an' ties the other end to a branch—*after settin' Bud up on my shoulders, with his legs one each side of my head an' his feet danglin' down on my chest.* . . . Yes, Sir. . . . And I calc'lated that if I *co*-lapsed, Bud's feet would still dangle—about a yard from the ground or a couple o' foot, when the rope stretched and gave a bit, or the bough bent a little. . . . And Mame stood face to face with us six feet away. . . ."

. . . . .

The Bucking Bronco fell silent—and no member of the little group of Legionaries broke the silence. I could see from their faces that even Tant-de-Soif and Alphonse Blanc grasped the situation—while from La Cigale, Dobroffski, and the Japanese, scarcely a *nuance* of meaning was hid.

It was plain that John Bull, Reginald Rupert, and William Jones visualized the scene more clearly, and felt its poignant horror more fully

than did 'Erb, ex-denizen of the foulest slums of London.

"*'Streuth!*" 'Erb murmured at last, and scratched his head.

"And then, '*I fear I must now leave you for a spell, ladies an' gents,*' ses Dago Jake," continued the American, "after he'd smacked his lips some, an' pointed out our cleverness and beauty to the grinnin' outfit—'*but I'll look in a bit later on—say this day week or so, an' pay my respex*'—and the hull outfit rides off, laffin' fit to bust.

"And there was we-all—Bud hevin' as long to live as I could stand up under his weight; an' me an' Mame with as long to live as starvation 'ud let us.

"No, there wasn't no hope of nobody comin' along through them prickly-pear flats. That didn't eventuate to happen once in a month—apart from Dago Jake layin' hisself out to *see* that it didn't happen till we-all had got what was acomin' to us.

"He c'd fix it to detain anybody what might come to Hackberry Crossin' plannin' to follow the trail we'd took West—which was as onlikely as celluloid apples in Hell—an' nobody never come East along it, 'cos there was a better one.

"Nope—we'd chose that highly onpopulous thoroughfare apurpose, travellin' modest an' onconspishus as before, an' the more so for to avoid onpleasantness for Mame consevent upon pursuit by Dago Jake.

"And there wouldn't be no Ranger patrol along neether. If any come at all, it'd be along the trail we'd reckoned as Jake'd take when he found we'd vamoosed durin' his temp'r'y indisposition of whisky-jag. . . .

"*Gee*-whillikins! what wouldn't I hev give fer that same Ranger, that Bud an' I had held up an' dispoiled contumelious, to happen along—even if it meant ten years striped pyjamas in the County Pen or in St. Quentin with hard labour, strait-jacket an' dungeons. I'd ha' fell upon his neck an' kissed him frequent an' free. . . . Yep. . . . And *then* some." . . .

The irrepressible 'Erb improved the occasion, as the big American ceased and seemed to stare into the past.

"Ah!" he moralized, "if you'd bin alivin' of a *h*onest life an' keepin' out o' trouble wi' the p'lice, you'd never 'a come to trouble like *that*. . . . It was all along o' yore interferin' wi' the copper as wanted to see the receipt for them 'osses, that you come ter grief."

"An' that's where yore wrong *agin*, Sonny,"

replied the Bucking Bronco with his big-dog-to-little-dog air of forbearance. "Though I allow youse an authority on avoidin' trouble with the perlice"—('Erb's presence in the Legion was consequent upon his hurried leaving of his country for his country's good)—"for it was entirely due to that same Ranger's ferocious pussonal interest in me that I'm alive to-day. He'd allowed he would trail me and Bud if it took the rest of his misspent life—an' arrest us lone-handed. He was that mad! Walkin' on foot without pant-suspenders *is* humiliatin' to a sensitive nature what has jest bin relieved of its gun."

He fell silent again, and nobody spoke or stirred.

"We talked a bit, at first," he continued after a long pause, "an' ole Bud Conklin showed his grit, cheering up Mame, an' sayin' Dago Jake was only playin' a trick on us. But the gal *knew* Dago Jake, an' soon she began to lose holt on herself. . . . I ain't blamin' her any. . . . She loved Bud Conklin, y'see. . . . She cried, and struggled, and screeched, and I wished she'd stop—until she begun to laugh, and then I'd rather she'd cried and screeched.

"And '*Come up, ol' hoss,*' says Bud to me,

when fust I staggered a bit—jest quiet like—jest like he'd said a thousand times when a tired pony stumbled under him.

"And by-an'-by he leans down an' whispers, '*I'd kick free of yer, pard, if it wan't for the gal.*'

"An' when I begins to tremble an' sway around, he leans down agin and says very quiet, '*Hold up till the gal faints or sleeps or su'think, Buck,*' he says. '*Hold up, ole pard. . . . She'll go mad for life if I dances an' jerks afore her eyes!*' . . . An' I know he weren't hevin' no daisy of a dandy time up there—and that he'd have kicked clear long ago but for the gal. . . .

"Faint? Sleep? Not she. . . . There she stood, face to face with us—havin' highstericks a spell, then laffin' a spell, then prayin' some. . . . Then croonin' over Bud Conklin like he was her babby. . . . Whiles, she'd praise me fer standin' firm an' savin' her man—an' there was a spell when the pore thing thought I was God.

"One time, 'bout mid-day, Bud Conklin swore an' cursed at Dago Jake till I fair blushed to hear him—an' then I waded in and beat him holler at swearin', an' cursin' the name of Dago Jake. . . . But *that* didn't cut no ice—nor cut our raw-hide lariats neither.

"In all them story-books about Red Injuns an' Deadwood Dicks an' such, the blue-eyed, golden-haired Hero *allus* busts his bonds. He figgers to bust 'em on time; then to find a saddled hoss standin' ready; likewise to pick up a new-loaded gun *and* a square meal by the road-side, before gallopin' a hundred miles to make a fuss o' the Villain and make a date with the Hero*ine*—jest as that husky hoodlum's criminile *ad*vances, drugs, stranglin's and starvin's is gettin' irksome to the young female. . . .

"I guess Dago Jake an' his outfit wasn't the guys as had roped up aforesaid Hero. . . . Nit. . . . But they *was* the guys as had roped up us, an' we didn't bust no bonds. Nary a bust. And once, towards evenin', I begun to sway so bad that I half dropped Bud, an' on'y got him straight on my shoulders agin, jest in time . . . (an' I hear the screech that Mame let, *now*, sometimes.) '*Air you achokin' any, Bud?*' I ses. '*No, pard,*' ses he, '*I ain't chokin' none, but you couldn't git a cigarette-paper between my neck an' this derned lasso. I allow nex' time will give little Willie a narsty cough an' a crick in the neck.*'

"An' at the same time we notices that Mame was still an' quiet, with her eyes shut. 'Now,

Buck,' ses Bud, *'fall down an' roll clear. . . . Better she sees me dead than watch me dyin'.'*

"*'Fall down, nawthen,'* says I. *'I'm agoin' to stand right here till the Day o' Jedgement; an' then I allow I'll donate Mister Tin-horn Dago Jake a tomato-eye.'* And right then Mame opens her eyes an' smiles sweet, up at Bud.

"*'Hevn't we played this silly game long enuff, Buddy?'* she says. *'I'm so tired. . . . Let's go git married, like we planned'*—an' I heerd Bud cough. She shuts her eyes agin then—an' very slow an' careful I turns right round so's not to see her no more.

. . . . .

"An' I stood still till it was dark. . . .

"So whether Mame died afore Bud or not—she didn't *see* him die, an' that there fact has kep' me from goin' bug-house like Cigale . . .

"*Her dead face an' Bud's boot-soles fer a day or two!* . . .

"Yep. It were that Ranger as arrested us. A dead woman tied to a tree, a dead man danglin' from it, an' a dead man lyin' just below his feet—on'y he wasn't quite dead.

"He was a White Man, that Ranger. He was hoppin' mad when he figgers out what had

happened, an' gives me rye-whisky, an' dopes me to sleep, an' lets me lie there some.

"He was young an' innercent, an' when he'd donated me some grub an' some more whisky, I talked to him eloquential. I *did* wanta tell Dago Jake good-bye, before the Ranger hiked me off to his Lieutenant, an' they rounded Jake an' his gang up. The Ranger allowed it was Bud what had held him up and treated him contumelious that day, an' thet as pore Bud had handed in his checks, an' I'd nearly done likewise, he was agoin' to fergit me. . . . He on'y wanted me as witness agin Dago Jake and Co., for the murder of Mame an' Bud. . . .

"An' as we jogs along I talks to him some more, an' in the end he lets me go to the adobe hut to tell Jake good-bye afore he arrests him.

. . . . . .

"'Bout four o'clock a.m. in the early mornin it was, and Jake sleepin' off a whisky-jag! . . . But he sobers up right slick when I wakes him and he sees my pretty face. . . . He didn't even reach for his gun—not that it was still there if he had. I allow he thought I'd come from hell for him.

"*I had.*

"Yep. I tells Dago Jake good-bye all-

right—all-right. An' without usin' no gun, nor knife, nor no other lethial weepon. I takes my farewell o' that gentle Spani-*ard* with my bare hands, and then I walks outer the shack a-singin'—

"'Roll your tail an' roll it high,
Fer you'll be an angel by-an-by,'

an' walkin' with a proud tail accordin'.

"'How *is* Dago Jake?' ses the Ranger.

"'He *ain't*,' ses I. . . ."

. . . . .

As usual it was 'Erb who spoke first.

"I b'lieve you bin tellin' the *troof*, Buck," said he, "an' that's disqualified in a bloomin' competition for 'oo can tell the biggest lie. My performin' rabbit wins, bless 'is liddle 'eart! Come along to the canteen, and . . ."

"I know a performin' train wot's got yore performin' jack rabbit skinned a mile," interrupted the American.

"Performin' *train?*" inquired 'Erb blankly.

"That's so," was the drawled reply. "You never seen such a slick train in Yurrup nor Africky. . . . I was makin' a quick get-away from that Ranger—an' he gallops on to the platform at the deepôt as this U.P.R. double-express fast train glides outa the station.

I leans well over the side of the observation-car and plants a kiss upon his bronzed an' manly cheek. . . . At least, I *begun* the kiss there, but where did that kiss *finish* ?

" On the southern end of an ole cow abrowsin' beside the track *thirty-three miles down the line!* Some train, and some travellin' that! . . . You an' yore performin' rabbit! You make me tired."

" 'Streuth!" murmured 'Erb again, and scratched his cropped head, as was his custom when endeavouring to grapple with mysteries beyond his ken.

. . . . .

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N'ayant pas de nation,
La France est votre Mère." . . .

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